

CHANGING IDEALS OF FEMININITY:
REPRESENTATIONS OF THUSNELDA IN KLOPSTOCK, KLEIST, AND GRABBE

by

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(Under the Direction of Alexander Sager)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the figure of Thusnelda in literary representations of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest undergoes a dramatic transformation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a change that parallels gender roles developing at that time. It considers how the development of bourgeois ideologies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the concomitant loss of women's influence within public and political spheres provide a socio-political context in which we can understand Thusnelda's literary role. It focuses on three major dramatic works dealing with the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, namely the Hermann dramas of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, Heinrich von Kleist, and Christian Dietrich Grabbe.

INDEX WORDS: Thusnelda, Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, Gender roles, Bourgeois ideologies, Hermann dramas, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, Heinrich von Kleist, Christian Dietrich Grabbe

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the ideological significance of the portrayal of Thusnelda in literary representations of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. First, I will examine the figure of Thusnelda in the historical accounts of Tacitus and Strabo and the literary contributions they inspired leading up to the late eighteenth century. Then I will discuss the development of Thusnelda's character in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Finally, I will discuss how this character embodies constructed ideals of femininity. I will examine how this perceived gender is reinforced by the repetition of Thusnelda's acts throughout the texts. With the development of bourgeois ideologies at this time, gender norms became more clearly and rigidly defined and the image of the virtuous woman was extended to that of the faithful wife and mother, reducing her sphere of influence to the home. The development of Thusnelda's character parallels the emergence of an ideal of the domestic middle class woman.

While there is substantial research on the figure of Thusnelda's husband, Arminius, and on the Teutoburg Battle itself, only recently has the figure of Thusnelda become of interest to scholarship. Thusnelda appears in many dramatic literary works dealing with this famous battle; however, this research will focus primarily on the dramas of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, Heinrich von Kleist, and Christian Dietrich Grabbe. These influential plays, though written with different agendas, reflect a shift in the feminine ideal over a century.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGING IDEALS OF FEMININITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF THUSNELDA IN KLOPSTOCK, KLEIST, AND GRABBE

The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE has sparked many imaginations ever since Tacitus' *Annals* were rediscovered and published in 1515. Other sources of the battle include Strabo's *Geographica*, Velleius Paterculus' *Historia Romana*, Florus' *Epitoma de Tito Livio*, and Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana*. None of these authors were eyewitnesses to the event. Velleius Paterculus was the only contemporary of the battle,¹ with Tacitus writing seven years later and Cassius Dio two centuries after the battle. Thus there are many inconsistencies between the accounts. However, it is generally believed that the Germanic-born and Roman-educated Arminius led the Germanic tribes in ambushing the Roman general Varus and the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth legions, resulting in the deaths of almost twenty thousand Roman troops. This unexpected blow halted Rome's expansion east of the Rhine and resulted in Emperor Augustus' decision to strengthen his military bases along the river frontier.²

In modern representations of the Battle of Teutoburg Forest, the love story of Arminius and his wife Thusnelda often plays a central role. Historically, little is known about their relationship. Of all the Roman sources, Thusnelda appears only briefly in Strabo's *Geographica* and Tacitus' *Annals*, and the latter does not even mention her by name. According to Tacitus' account, Segestes, a Germanic prince who was loyal to Rome, warned Varus that Arminius was raising a rebellion amongst the Germanic tribes. However, Varus did not heed his warning and

¹ Though he did not write his account until later.

² Peter S. Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome*, 15.

paid for it with his life. Though Tacitus, who is narrating events of 15-16 CE, does not give much description of the battle seven years before, he tells us that after the battle, Segestes was rescued by the Roman general Germanicus from the vengeance of his countrymen. Along with Segestes, Germanicus also took Segestes' pregnant daughter, who, Tacitus tells us, is the wife of Arminius, and other kinsmen. The seizure of his wife enraged Arminius, who again roused the neighboring tribes into a fury against the Romans, leading to further skirmishes between the tribes and Germanicus until the year 16 CE, when the Romans finally withdrew.

From Strabo, we learn two things. First, the daughter of Segestes and the wife of Arminius was called Thusnelda. Second, Thusnelda was led through a triumphal procession in Rome by Germanicus after the Roman forces finally withdrew from Germania. We know from Tacitus that it was Segestes who handed Thusnelda over to Germanicus, and Strabo mentions Segestes' presence on the Roman side of the triumphal procession.³ Though there have been numerous artistic representations of this event,⁴ it plays little part in literary accounts of the battle. However, based on this information, many assumptions have been made about the relationship between Thusnelda and her father, who believed her to have been kidnapped by Arminius and therefore hated the rebel leader for more than political reasons.⁵ This is the extent of our historical knowledge about Thusnelda. We have no evidence that she was reunited with Arminius before the latter's death in 21 CE.

From these brief accounts, however, wonderful stories have emerged: tales of love, betrayal, and a horrific battle. The history of the Teutoburg events has served multiple functions,

³ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals I*, 57-58, 340-341.

⁴ For example, see Karl von Piloty "Thusnelda im Triumphzug des Germanicus" (1873).

⁵ "Segestes, quamquam consensu gentis in bellum tractus, discors manebat, auctis privatim odiis, quod Arminius filiam eius alii pactam rapuerat: gener inuisus inimici soceri, quaeque apud concordem vincula caritatis, incitamenta irarum apud infensos errant." English translation: "Segestes, though forced into the war by the united will of the nation, continued to disapprove, and domestic episodes embittered the feud: for Arminius by carrying off his daughter, who was pledged to another, had made himself the hated son-in-law of a hostile father, and a relationship which cements the affection of friends now stimulated the fury of enemies." Tacitus, *The Annals I*, 55, 336-337.

from Luther's Reformation and his refashioning of the Roman "Arminius" into the German "Hermann,"⁶ to ties to a German national identity and the later exploitation of these ideas by the National Socialists. Authors have expanded on the historical figures of the battle to serve their own political agendas and to entertain their readers. Arminius is portrayed as a great hero, the Germanic warrior who pushed the Roman legions back over the Rhine, and as a defender of liberty and unity.⁷ Numerous studies have dealt with the development of the Arminius myth over the centuries. Only recently, however, have scholars begun to examine Thusnelda's role in the literary tradition.⁸ Like that of Arminius, Thusnelda's portrayal has also varied according to the historical period and cultural context in which it was created. With little factual basis for her role in the battle and her personality, the development of her character is left to each author's creative discretion and manipulation.

Hermann's representation as a national hero varies little throughout most reproductions of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. In some accounts, like Heinrich von Kleist's, he is more brutal, in others, like Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's and Christian Dietrich Grabbe's, more merciful. However, he is always portrayed as a strong and clever leader. The character of Thusnelda, on the other hand, has changed dramatically throughout history. From Amazonian warrior in Lohenstein's massive novel⁹ to doting housewife in Grabbe's play, Thusnelda's role reflects the changing ideology of women's roles over time.

Just as Thusnelda's character changes throughout history and there are gender implications of her varying functions in literature, her character develops and transforms within

⁶ Martin Luther may have been the first to associate the name Arminius with Hermann. He writes, in his discussion of the 82nd Psalm, "Herman, den die Latini ubel verkeren und Ariminium (sic) nennen, heist aber ein Heer man, dux belli." As quoted in Herbert W. Benario, "Arminius into Hermann," 89. Many of the authors covered in this paper also refer to the Germanic hero as "Hermann," and I will use the two names accordingly.

⁷ Richard Kuehnemund, *Arminius or the Rise of a National Symbol*, xi.

⁸ See Griffiths, Kapczynski, Kennedy, and Krimmer.

⁹ *Großmütiger Feldherr Arminius* (1689).

each text. Simone de Beauvoir writes that, “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.”¹⁰ This idea of constructed gender is further examined by Judith Butler in her article, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” She writes:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts [...]. This formation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted social temporality. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.¹¹

If we consider Butler’s theory of gender and the character of Thusnelda, we understand two things: first, and most obviously, that Thusnelda’s feminine identity is constructed by each author in his appropriate time and the society to which he belongs, and is reinforced by the repetition of her acts throughout the text. Secondly, and more subtly, the character of Thusnelda also develops and changes within each text, fluctuating between performances of traditionally feminine and masculine acts, the former revered and the latter demonized. This dichotomy of femininity is represented most significantly in Kleist’s play, though it is apparent in other authors as well. I propose that as many scholars have examined Arminius as a source of masculine and national identity, Thusnelda should also be considered as a source of changing feminine identity.

Thusnelda’s character in the works of Klopstock, Kleist, and Grabbe, provides an interesting insight into the shift of gender roles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

¹⁰ Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, 283.

¹¹ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519-520.

centuries. Ute Brandes explains the role of literature in furthering bourgeois values during this time:

By the late 1700s, literary works had gained an increasingly important role as the mediators of moral values for the rising middle class. The development of a literary market oriented toward new readers and opposing courtly and clerical domination fostered a new emphasis on the potential of individuals as autonomous, self-directed personalities who, through their use of reason and morality, would enable themselves to unfold freely their talents and interests. Such a process of self-empowerment would set free productive energies and result in universal progress in culture, in the economy, and in overall social cooperation. The fact that women were included as helpmates in this progressive self-improvement, but not as publicly autonomous, self-directed human beings, was initially not seen as a contradiction in the demand for equality, brotherhood, and freedom.¹²

While literature was used to reinforce the liberal views of human emancipation, it also furthered the sexual stereotypes of the developing middle class. As men worked to gain wealth and power in the public sphere, women were delegated to supporting roles in the private sphere. Similarly, in the Hermann stories, Thusnelda may play a significant role, but it is always secondary to that of her husband.

¹² Ute Brandes, "Escape to America," 158.

CHAPTER 3

SURVEY OF THE THUSNELDA THEME

Since the re-discovery of the Roman sources during the Renaissance, there have been numerous representations of the events surrounding the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. From Daniel Casper von Lohenstein to Christian Dietrich Grabbe, each author attempts to recreate this famous battle, some adhering more to the historical accounts than others. Many of these dramas never saw the stage, or were performed long after their author's death. Some, like Grabbe's, were the last works of their authors, published posthumously, and are noticeably missing from many collections of their works. Between 1676 and 1910, there is record of 75 operas on the Arminius theme.¹³ In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Arminius theme spread to the literatures of Germany's neighbors,¹⁴ including the French tragic-comedy "*Arminius, ou les frères ennemis*" by Georges de Scudéry in 1643.¹⁵

Thusnelda is strikingly absent from the first known literary representation of the battle, Ulrich von Hutten's *Arminius*, written in 1520.¹⁶ It is a dialogue between Alexander, Scipio, and Hannibal in the court of Minos concerning who among them is the most successful war general. Arminius enters the scene with the complaint that he should also be considered as a contender. After listening to Hermann's arguments, Minos concedes that he should be honored for his excellent qualities and character.

¹³ Herbert W. Benario, "Arminius into Hermann," 89.

¹⁴ Kuehnemund 49.

¹⁵ Kösters' *Mythos Arminius* provides an excellent survey of the Hermann reception.

¹⁶ It was published post-humously in 1538 and 1557, though its German translation did not appear until 1815. Benario 87.

Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's novel, *Großmütiger Feldherr Arminius*, appeared in 1689 and originally was contained in two volumes of nine books each and spanned 3,074 pages. This heroic epic combines Lohenstein's own version of Germany's heroic past with elements of the historical sources. The character of Arminius expresses the baroque ideal of human heroism and greatness in responding to an ambiguous fate.¹⁷ Thusnelda also plays a large and significant role in the text. In contrast to later works, here Thusnelda takes an active role in the fight, dressing as a man and almost killing her father who fights on the Roman side before recognizing him. She is torn between filial devotion to her father, who has, for his own selfish motivations, promised her to Arminius, Tiberius, and Marbod, and her own patriotism and loyalty to her husband. However when her father is to be executed as a traitor, she pleads to be taken in his place, a passionate act that wins her the admiration of Arminius. In Lohenstein's dialogue of goodness and evil, Thusnelda and Arminius illustrate righteous and heroic will in action.

Thusnelda also makes an appearance in Johann Elias Schlegel's *Hermann* (1743). Consisting of five acts, the play depicts conflict among the Germanic princes on the eve and following days of battle. The patriotic and anti-Roman characters ultimately prevail over the wavering or pro-Roman ones. Hermann and Thusnelda seem more dedicated to their country than each other. As in Lohenstein's text, Thusnelda is again used as a political ploy by her father, and he offers her to Flavius despite her betrothal to his brother Hermann.

Cornelius von Ayrenhoff produced two Hermann plays: *Hermann und Thusnelde*, a tragedy written in 1768 and later reprinted under the title of *Hermanns Tod* and *Thumelicus, oder Hermanns Rache* in 1770. Like Klopstock's *Hermann und die Fürsten*, *Hermanns Tod* takes place after the battle and illustrates the discord among the Germanic princes. The Romans return Thusnelda and her son Thumelicus to Hermann as part of a peace treaty. However, the Germanic

¹⁷ Kuehnemund 39.

princes desire to defeat the Romans entirely and reject the peace offering. Hermann must decide whether to sacrifice his wife and son for a potential victory or to accept the peace offering and lose the opportunity for liberation. In order to alleviate this decision and enable her husband to fight freely, Thusnelda returns to Rome of her own accord. After her departure, her father Segestes is taken prisoner for his threats of desertion and ultimately stabs Hermann with a dagger. Hermann dies in Thusnelda's arms, and she kills herself over his body. Von Ayrenhoff's drama is one of the few that places Thusnelda on an equal footing with her husband,¹⁸ though, like we will see in Klopstock's trilogy, her life cannot continue without the presence of Hermann.

Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de la Motte Fouqué's *Hermann, ein Helden Spiel in 4 Abenteuern*, similar to many other plays about the battle, focuses not on the conflict itself but its aftermath and the disharmony among the victors. Thusnelda and her son Thumelicus are abducted by Segestes and sent to Italy. Hermann attempts to free them but is killed by his father-in-law. Fouqué anachronistically blends Christian religion into the heroic plot and, as Thusnelda has been converted to Christianity in Italy, Hermann hears her voice before his death asking him to exchange the pagan Valhalla for the Christian heaven.

In the seventeenth century, Thusnelda is often represented as an Amazonian woman, actively participating in the battle and inspiring love in the Germanic hero by her passion.¹⁹ Lohenstein wrote his heroic version of the Teutoburg Battle for the entertainment of seventeenth century noblemen²⁰ during a time when court society granted at least some aristocratic women the opportunity to wield power. However, by the nineteenth century, Thusnelda's role had changed remarkably. In Klopstock's works, written in the late 1700s, and Kleist's play *Die*

¹⁸ Benario 88-89.

¹⁹ See Lohenstein's *Arminius* (1689).

²⁰ Kuehnemund 38.

Hermannsschlacht, written in 1808, Thusnelda still possesses some of the unbridled passion that made her so interesting in Lohenstein's novel. However, she attempts to manipulate male power rather than demanding power of her own. She is rarely a decision-maker in politics or the events of the battle. By the time of Grabbe's play in 1838, Thusnelda's only passion is for her husband and fatherland and her sphere is limited to domestic activities. By looking at the works of Klopstock, Kleist, and Grabbe, we can see how, over a century, her character evolves to reflect bourgeois values in which a woman's sphere of influence was relegated to the private domain.

CHAPTER 4

THUSNELDA IN THE WORKS OF FRIEDRICH GOTTLIEB KLOPSTOCK

Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's contribution to the literary representations of the Teutoburg Battle and its surrounding events is extensive, spanning forty years and comprising several odes, including "Hermann und Thusnelda" (1754) and "Hermann" (1767), as well as three plays: *Hermanns Schlacht* (1767), *Hermann und die Fürsten* (1767-68), and *Hermanns Tod* (1785-87).²¹ According to Richard Kuehnemund, Klopstock's writings had great patriotic influence in the late eighteenth century, inspiring many of the later Hermann dramas:

It cannot be denied that the poet's own enthusiasm for Germanic antiquity, which embraced his heroes Arminius and Thusnelda, inflamed a young generation to new heights of patriotic fervor.²²

However, Hans Kohn clarifies that, despite his patriotic plays, Klopstock was concerned for the advancement of the individual, not the nation:

But with all his glorification of the old German glory, Klopstock loved neither war nor martial glory, neither the state nor conquest and power. He sang of liberty; not national liberty, but individual liberty, human liberty, freedom from oppression by authority. He hated all political thirst for power and regarded it as opposed to morality and religion, to virtue and love of humanity, for which his heart yearned.²³

Klopstock's patriotism is inspired by his religious beliefs and idealism, rather than concrete political attachments. Written before the Napoleonic Era, his Hermann plays are not, like Kleist's, propaganda to motivate an uprising, nor do they strive for realism like Grabbe's. Rather, Klopstock's Hermann trilogy illustrates the conflict between a rising middle class and a military,

²¹ Kuehnemund 75.

²² Kuehnemund 74.

²³ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 419-420.

landowning aristocracy.²⁴ The battle is portrayed as a justified war against oppressors, mirroring the enthusiasm Klopstock felt in the aftermath of the American Revolution, as well as the initial uprisings of the French.²⁵

As this research is dedicated to the representations of Thusnelda in literature, she will be the focus of the following examination of Klopstock's odes and dramas.²⁶ In these texts, Thusnelda's role develops from the passionate wife awaiting her husband's return from battle to the mediator in significant political events. Though she does not participate in the battle or have the power to make political decisions, she voices her opinions and lends a spirit of sympathy and forgiveness to an otherwise binary view of heroes and traitors.

Klopstock shares his vision of Thusnelda in a letter to his friend Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, written after the composition of the second play in his Hermann trilogy. He describes his request to Angelika Kauffmann to have a portrait painted of herself dressed in the character of Thusnelda:

Ich habe sie gebeten, sich als Thusnelda zu mahlen, näml.: Einen Köcher an der Schulter, in Leinen mit Purpuraufschlage gekleidet, die Arme fast ganz bloß; ein Feldblumenkranz mit etwas jungen Eichenlaube untermischt [...] die ganze Mine siehet freudetrunken auf einen römischen Adler herunter, den Thusnelda mit beyden Händen angefaßt hat.²⁷

This image of Thusnelda calls to mind Tacitus' physical description of Germanic women:

Women often wear outer garments of linen ornamented with a purple pattern; and as the upper part of these is sleeveless, the whole of their arms, and indeed the parts of their breasts nearest the shoulders, are exposed.²⁸

²⁴ Elystan Griffiths, "Hermanns Schlachten," 127.

²⁵ Kuehnemund 76.

²⁶ For a better understanding of the nationalistic elements and Arminius figure in Klopstock's, as well as in many other authors' works, see Richard Kuehnemund's *Arminius or the Rise of a National Symbol in Literature*.

²⁷ Klopstock, *Briefe*, 247.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Germania*, 116.

In addition to Tacitus' account, Klopstock also describes Thusnelda's passionate gaze at a Roman eagle, a victory prize, which shows her intense connection to the battle. This relationship between women, specifically Thusnelda, and battle plays a pivotal role in Klopstock's representation of the Germanic princess.

“Hermann und Thusnelda”

In Klopstock's ode “Hermann und Thusnelda,” Thusnelda is an impassioned speaker. She is enthralled by Hermann, who is covered in the gore, dust, and sweat of battle, and she proclaims to never have loved him better than in this moment:

Ha, dort kömmt er mit Schweiss, mit Römerblute,
Mit dem Staube der Schlacht bedeckt! so schön war
Hermann niemals! So hat's ihm
Nie von dem Auge geflammt!

Komm'! ich bebe vor Lust! reich mir den Adler
Und das triefende Schwert! komm', athm', und ruh hier
Aus in meiner Umarmung,
Von der zu schrecklichen Schlacht!

Ruh' hier, dass ich den Schweiss der Stirn abtrockne.
Und der Wange das Blut! Wie glüht die Wange!
Hermann! Hermann! so hat dich
Niemals Thusnelda geliebt!²⁹

Thusnelda's passion is heightened by Hermann's appearance as a warrior. Her adoring reception is Hermann's prize for his victory in battle. Thusnelda functions as the mythic maiden waiting for her hero's return.

This idea of a man either seeking death on a battlefield or returning victoriously to his waiting bride is not new to Klopstock's time.³⁰ We also encounter it later in his play *Hermanns Schlacht*, when a warrior tells Hermann how his wife serves as the catalyst for his involvement in the battle:

²⁹ Klopstock, *Oden*, 105.

³⁰ See Hermann Glaser, *Cultural Roots of National Socialism*, 193.

Meine Braut sagte zu mir: Einen Adler, oder ich mag dich nicht wiedersehn! Es war mir, als sänge sie mir Bardengesang; aber ich antwortete ihr nicht. Ich hab' auch nur in der Schlacht gespielt, als wär's Waffentanz gewesen. Allein, da die Adlercohorte von Neuem vordrang, und der Kriegsgesang eben sehr stolz herunter scholl, da wüthete ich, daß ich nicht mehr weiß, wie ich ihn nahm! Nun habe ich ihn, und meine Braut seh' ich auch wieder.³¹

The wife insists that her husband brings her an eagle as proof of his victory or she will refuse to see him again. In this instance, we see the great influence Tacitus had on Klopstock's ideas of the Germanic people.³² In *Germania*, Tacitus explains that throwing away one's shield in battle is viewed as a great dishonor and the Germanic warrior who does so can no longer attend sacrifices or the assembly. He also describes that during battle, the men's wives and children would stand as witnesses "whom each man reverences most highly, whose praise he most desires."³³ Thus following Tacitus' account, both Thusnelda and the wife of the warrior serve as motivators for battle as well as rewards for their husbands' victory.³⁴

"Hermann"

In the ode "Hermann," three bards, Werdomar, Kerding, and Darmond, sing Hermann's praises, while bemoaning his fate of dying at the hands of his kinsmen rather than on the battlefield. Thusnelda is mentioned in this ode as well, as the bards imagine the effect Hermann's death will have on the widowed woman and condemn anyone who brings her this sad news:

Verschweigts Thusnelda, verschweigts,
Daß hier in Blut ihr Hermann liegt!

Sagts dem edlen Weibe, der unglückseligen Mutter nicht,
Daß ihres Thumeliko Vater hier in Blute liegt!

³¹ Klopstock, *Hermanns Schlacht*, 132.

³² See Jost Hermand, "Back to the Roots," 1989.

³³ Tacitus, *Germania*, 106-107.

³⁴ Though Tacitus is one of the few writers who provides insight into the life of the Germanic people, it must be noted that his portrayals of the Germanic people are not without embellishment. It is generally acknowledged that they are idealized accounts to serve as a contrast to the moral decadence Tacitus witnessed in Rome. Nevertheless, the discovery of his *Germania* and *Annals* inspired Klopstock's and many other poetic works.

Ihr nicht, die schon vor des stolzen Triumphs
 Fürchterlichem Wagen in der Fessel ging!
 Du hast ein Römerherz,
 Der das der Unglückseligen sagen kann!³⁵

Instead of a wife waiting for the return of her hero, Thusnelda is the unhappy widow. Her misfortune derives not only from the loss of her husband, but also from the unheroic manner of his death. The portrayal of Thusnelda as a weak, helpless widow in this ode differs from the strong, self-sufficient woman portrayed later in Klopstock's plays. Here the bards assume the position of her protectors, trying to shield her from unhappy news. However, when Thusnelda learns of Hermann's impending death in *Hermanns Tod*, she accepts the news without tears, only bemoaning their short reunion, and resolves to die with her husband.

Hermanns Schlacht

Written in 1767, the first play of the Hermann trilogy, *Hermanns Schlacht*, consists of fourteen scenes depicting the third and final day of battle. However, the stage is not set on the battlefield, rather it is with those waiting to hear news of the results. Bards sing of past deeds of heroism and judgment is brought on the traitors Segestes, Siegmund, and Flavius. Through the bards, the unification of the Germanic tribes and the death of those who love their fatherland more than their own lives are glorified:

Wir kühnes Volk, wir haben Jünglinge
 Mit leichten Blumenschilden und schönen Wunden,
 Die lieber sterben, als leben,
 Wenn's gilt für die Freiheit!³⁶

These patriotic elements in the play held a deep attraction for Klopstock, as he confides to his friend Gleim, in a letter about his revision of *Hermanns Schlacht*, dated 19 December 1767:

Hermanns Schlacht, ein Bardiet für die Schaubühne liegt auch zum Drucke fertig.
 Weil ich mit Ihnen eben so schwaze, so kann ich Ihnen wohl davon sagen, daß ich

³⁵ Klopstock, *Oden*, 209.

³⁶ Klopstock, *Hermanns Schlacht*, 100.

sie ein wenig lieb habe, u[nd] daß sie sehr vaterländisch ist, u[nd] weil mirs mit diesem Vaterländischen sehr von Herzen gegangen ist, u[nd] ich mich dabey weder auf einen kritischen Dreyfuß noch Vierfuß hingesezt, u[nd], nach Herausbringung des viellehrenden Sazes: Ein Nationalgedicht interessiert die Nation, die es angeht! Geschrieben habe so denke ich, daß jenes vaterländische wieder zu Herzen gehn soll.³⁷

Characters such as Hermann's father Siegmar and the old druid Brenno serve as patriotic ideals and are esteemed for their wisdom. Siegmar, despite his age, wants to participate in the battle and dies fighting for his people. Brenno serves as the representative of justice and passes judgment on those who have betrayed their country. When, in the fourth scene, Thusnelda's father and Rome-supporter Segestes tries to justify his Roman allegiance to Brenno, claiming that if Brenno were more acquainted with the Romans he, too, would prefer the safety of their governance to the uncertainty of war, Brenno is unmoved and reprimands Segestes: "Dein ganzes Volk will Freyheit! Und du willst Sklaverey."³⁸ As the Germanic tribes are fighting for their freedom from Roman oppression, Brenno criticizes Segestes for not joining the battle, calling him a traitor.

Like in the ode "Hermann und Thusnelda," in *Hermanns Schlacht* Thusnelda again plays the woman waiting at home, worrying over her husband's fate, while he fights for freedom. She first appears in the fifth scene at Wodan's altar, seeking to discover whether the rumor she has heard of Hermann's injury is true. Brenno comforts her and she agrees to leave Hermann's fate to Wodan. However, she only finds happiness in the tenth scene with the discovery that he lives. She tells Brenno she will wait for his return by the altar and rejoices in her honorable husband:

Ich will hier unsern Hermann erwarten. Denn so muß ich den Liebling des Vaterlandes heut nennen, obgleich mein Herz ihn niemals lauter meinen Hermann genannt hat! Glücklicher, glücklicher war nie ein Weib eines ehrenvollen Mannes, als ich heute bin!³⁹

³⁷ Klopstock, *Briefe*, 45.

³⁸ Klopstock, *Hermanns Schlacht*, 62-63.

³⁹ Klopstock 120.

Like in the earlier odes, here Thusnelda's happiness depends on her husband's success in battle. However, despite her longing for her husband's safe return, their reunion lacks the passion of "Hermann und Thusnelda." In the play, Hermann is far more interested in discovering how his men have fared than greeting his wife. His lack of recognition prompts her to exclaim, "Ach Hermann, du siehst deine Thusnelda nicht einmal an?" Hermann then greets her warmly, excusing his behavior as a result of the heat and bloodiness of battle (127). Although she accepts his justification, this scene reveals her position as secondary. She not only waits for him to return from battle, but also waits for his acknowledgment.

Even as a Germanic princess, Thusnelda does not have authority to make political decisions, although she influences many. In the sixth scene, Thusnelda's brother, Siegmund, abandons the Romans and returns to Wodan's altar eager to fight for the Germanic tribes. He asks his sister to be a witness to his surrender and his last request is that he may fight for his fatherland before he is killed as a traitor.⁴⁰ Thusnelda is easily persuaded of his renewed patriotism, and encourages Brenno to accept him. The old druid, however, is skeptical of Siegmund's allegiances, citing Hermann's brother as an example of Germanic traitors:

Wir haben sehr warnungsvolle Beispiele, Thusnelda! Ich führe nur eins an. Deines Hermanns Bruder, Flavius, ficht jetzt unter den Römern, wenn anders Wodans Rache den Verräther bis heut leben ließ (73-74).

Despite Brenno's insistence to the contrary, Thusnelda trusts the sincerity of her brother's motives. She again asks that Brenno receive him. However, Brenno responds with frustration and lectures her on her youthful ignorance:

Flavius, Flavius! und ... Du kennst die Menschen noch nicht, Thusnelda! Ich bin ein Greis geworden, ehe ich sie habe kennen gelernt. Die Menschen drüben über

⁴⁰ According to Tacitus, Segestes' son Siegmund left Roman service and joined the rebellion in 9 CE, but attempted to reestablish loyalties with the Romans with Germanicus invaded in 15 CE. Strabo says that Siegmund was led as a prisoner in the triumphal procession in 17 CE. Nothing is known of his ultimate fate.

den Eisgebirgen meine ich: auch die meine ich, die unter ihnen ihre deutsche Stammart ausrotteten (75).

Like many other authors, Klopstock portrays Thusnelda as naïve and incapable of understanding the complexity of war and the deception of men. Her concern is more for her husband's safety than for victory. When Hermann returns from battle, she proudly sings a song with her chorus of women, praising her husband and his deeds in combat. However, Hermann modestly refuses her praises and echoes Brenno's assertion that she is ignorant of the ways of war:

Thusnelda! ... meine Thusnelda! ... aber das verdient' ich nicht! Du weißt nicht, wie unsre Fürsten gefochten haben (148-154).

She does not understand the hearts of men anymore than she understands their martial contests. Yet her instinct and compassion prove to be correct in Siegmund's case, as he ultimately proves his innocence to Brenno. It is clear that without his sister's intervention, Siegmund would have been hastily executed as a traitor.

Like the discovery of her own brother in chains, Thusnelda pleads for the life of another traitor, Hermann's brother Flavius, when he is taken prisoner by the Germanic warriors. Unlike Siegmund, Flavius is unrepentant and insists that the Germanic tribes should submit to the Roman conquerors (115). Though Thusnelda concedes that his mere presence as a traitor desecrates Wodan's altar, she insists that Flavius not be killed and no more Germans die that day.⁴¹ Brenno argues that he is no longer a German; however, Thusnelda insists he be spared, since Flavius is Siegmund's son and Hermann's brother (122). Where Brenno is hasty to condemn Flavius and Hermann is reluctant to pass judgment, wishing his brother had died in the fight and spared him this decision (142), Thusnelda does not hesitate to grant mercy and offer forgiveness.

⁴¹ Klopstock, like many others, anachronistically labels the Germanic people as Germans and their territories as Germany.

She implores Hermann to spare his brother, which he does, and ultimately, Flavius repents his Roman allegiance when he discovers his father is mortally wounded.

Hermann's mother serves as Thusnelda's antithesis, and where Thusnelda pleads for mercy, Bercennis demands revenge. She accuses Hermann of not avenging her husband's death in battle. And though Hermann responds that he plans to take action against the living legions rather than his Roman prisoners, she is unsatisfied but unable to change his mind. Like Thusnelda, she has the freedom to voice her opinion but little political agency to take action. Griffiths summarizes the portrayal of women in Klopstock's play as limited, but important:

This pact between the poet and the warrior is sealed in part through a shared view of women as passive and in need of protection. Nonetheless, Klopstock portrays his female characters as capable of patriotic fervour and as mediators within the community. Thus we might characterize Klopstock's vision of Germany as one in which women play a secondary, but nonetheless significant role.⁴²

Like many other representations of the battle (with Lohenstein's as the great exception), Thusnelda does not play an active role in the battle; however, she influences significant events outside of the battle and both Flavius and Siegmund are saved due to her compassionate intervention. Her presence and political intervention cast a critical light on Germanic martial society, which consists of only patriots and traitors. As a mediator, she provides forgiveness in an otherwise compassionless world. She compensates for the flaws in their ideology and perhaps understands more about the hearts of men than Brenno is willing to admit. Though, in the following play Siegmund again changes allegiances, Flavius remains loyal.

⁴² Griffiths 130.

Hermann und die Fürsten

The second play in Klopstock's Hermann dramas, *Hermann und die Fürsten*, takes place seven years after the famous battle described in *Hermanns Schlacht*. The Romans have again invaded Germania and there is discord among the Germanic princes. Like the first play, the sixteen scenes contain songs of patriotism, reminding the princes what they are fighting for:

Sie stritten für den Säugling im Schooß!
Für den Greis am Stabe! Die weise Mutter!
Die blühnede, liebende Braut!
Für Hain und Altar!⁴³

This patriotism, however, is threatened by the growing resentment of Hermann among the princes, fueled by Ingomar and Gambriv. The princes are envious of Hermann's growing fame. Rather than follow his strategy, which has been successful before, and ambush the Romans in the woods, the princes want to destroy the Romans in their camps. They are willing to risk victory in order to prevent Hermann from attaining more glory. With only the support of the old druid Brenno and young prince Katwald, Hermann is unable to persuade the princes to abandon their plans. They attack Caecina's camp unsuccessfully, which prompts Brenno to tell the wounded Ingomar:

Möchtet ihr, du, Arpe, und Gambriv liegen, und Schlummern, und ausgesorgt haben, damit Hermann wieder allein sorgen könnte. Er wuste es, und er weiß es, was es ist mit den Römern schlagen, Er nur hat die rechte, laute, volle Stimme, den Untergang über sie herbey zu rufen, und nicht ihr! (122).

Brenno reminds the prince that they had been successful in the past under Hermann's leadership, whereas the pride and dissension of the princes has now cost them another victory. Although the battle has been lost and Hermann has fled, the play ends with Brenno's patriotic words to a centurion: "Besiegen könnt ihr uns; aber nie sollt ihr Deutschland erobern" (132).

⁴³ Klopstock, *Hermann und die Fürsten*, 81.

Thusnelda is not physically present in the play, but the audience is informed of her fate through her and Hermann's affectionate son Theude, who swears to avenge his mother's capture.

Theude tells the prince Malwend:

O nenne mir meine Mutter nicht, sonst muß ich weinen. Sie ist bey den Römern!
und mein Bruder Themeliko auch (33).

Thusnelda and Thumeliko are in Rome. As we know from Tacitus' *Annals*, her father Segestes is responsible for their imprisonment. In the fifth scene, Hermann discovers more about Thusnelda's activities from a prisoner who has seen her in Rome. Hermann first asks if his son Thumeliko lives. Fearing her fate, he only asks about his wife at the prompting of his other son, Theude, and discovers that she lives in the Roman countryside and has few visitors. According to the prisoner, Thusnelda does not weep, but she is pale and looks as she did during Varus' time. The prisoner brings Hermann the following message from Thusnelda, which illustrates her agitated state of mind and also her unrelenting concern for her homeland:

Sag Hermann, daß ich wie die Blume am Bache blühe! Nein, sage das nicht, sage ihm, wie es ist, daß ich wohl nicht lange mehr leben werde! Sage ihm, er soll um meinentwillen nichts thun, was er sonst nicht thäte. Aber er liebt ohn dieß, und muß sein Vaterland mehr lieben als mich! Sage meinem Hermann, sage dem Streiter für die Freyheit Deutschlands, daß ich ihn nie vergessen werde ... daß er aber, wenn er bittere Stunden hat, sie nicht durch mein Andenken sich noch bitterer machen soll, sondern sich dann nur seiner Thusnelda erinnern, wenn er des Tyrannenblutes so viel vergießt daß sie keine Triumphe halten können (46).

Thusnelda struggles with what to tell her husband. First she wishes to comfort him and assure him of her welfare. Then she tells the truth, that she no longer wishes to live. However, she instructs him to continue fighting for their fatherland and freedom. Though she is far from home, she still serves as motivation for the battle. She tells him to only think of her in victory so that he is not distracted from his fight for freedom. This self-sacrificial nature is reflected in many representations of the heroic Thusnelda. Hermann is proud of his wife and imagines Thusnelda's

strength when she stood before Caesar, describing her noble demeanor to Herminone, one of the Germanic noblewomen:

Weist du auch, Herminone, wie Thusnelda vor dem Cäsar stand, da sie ihm Segest übergab, er nun nicht mehr allein der Verräther seines Vaterlandes, sondern auch ihr Verräther? Unter den hohen Frauen stand sie, aber meines Sinnes, nicht seine Tochter, sondern mein Weib! zu stolz um zu weinen! kein bittender Laut! den Feuerblick (ach ich kenn ihn wohl!) auf den schwangern Leib! auf ihr ungebohrnes Kind, das nun schon Sklav war. Herminone! und zu diesem Allen nun noch der schreckliche Todeswagen! Herminone! jener Mitleid, durch viel des Tyrannenbluts, den stolzesten aller Verhöhnungen, den Triumphen, Einhalt zu thun, durch unversiegender Wunden ohne Zahl, durch Todeswunden ohne Zahl, das Mitleid werden heute die Führer unsrer Heere mit ihren Fürstinnen nicht haben! (47).

Though she has been betrayed by her father, she stands unflinching before the Roman leader. This is another nod to Tacitus' writings, which also describes Thusnelda's unyielding courage and loyalty to her husband after being among the Germanic people captured by Germanicus:

They included some women of high birth, among them the wife of Arminius, who was at the same time the daughter of Segestes, though there was more of the husband than the father in that temper which sustained her, unconquered to a tear, without a word of entreaty, her hands clasped tightly in the folds of her robe and her gaze fixed on her heavy womb.⁴⁴

Tacitus' special emphasis on Thusnelda's passionate gaze at her swollen belly can be interpreted in many ways. She does not weep over her fate, but concerns herself only with her unborn child. This offspring of Arminius binds her more to her husband than her traitor father. In underscoring her pregnancy, Tacitus may also be symbolically intimating the new generation of Germanic people who will threaten Rome's power.

Though Thusnelda is physically absent from the play, we see the beginning of her transformation, from the waiting wife in the first play to the strong, passionate woman in the last installment.

⁴⁴ "Inerant feminae nobiles, inter quas uxor Arminii eademque filia Segestis, mariti magis quam parentis animo. Neque evicta in lacrimas neque voce supplex, compressis intra sinum manibus gravidum uterum intuens." Tacitus *The Annals I*, 57. 340-341.

Hermanns Tod

The last part of Hermann's trilogy, *Hermanns Tod* (1785-87), takes place years after Hermann's battle with Varus and continues the themes of inner discord found in *Hermann und die Fürsten*. Hermann struggles with the other Germanic princes, Marbod and Ingomar. The "bardiet"⁴⁵ in twenty-three scenes consists of debates over the significance of Roman and Germanic gods, the reunion of Hermann and Thusnelda after her captivity in Rome, and Hermann's trial at the hands of Segestes and the other princes.

The play begins with a wounded Hermann awaiting the return of his wife Thusnelda. Though Thusnelda does not personally appear until the thirteenth scene, she is always present in Hermann's speech. Unlike the first play, in which Hermann hardly seems to notice his wife after battle, he persistently asks for her and impatiently awaits her arrival, emphasizing their passionate, romantic connection. Bojokal, one of the Germanic princes, confirms this notion by telling Hermann's faithful friend Horst that Thusnelda, "heiterte [Hermanns] Leben auf, und war oft der Funke, der in ihm zur Flamme wurde."⁴⁶

When the couple is finally reunited, Cepio informs Hermann and the audience of Thusnelda's participation in the triumph procession in Rome and the effect her presence had on Germanicus:

Sie ist vor dem Triumphwagen gewesen, und in ... ich mag es nicht aussprechen; aber keine Römerin liebte in dem Augenblick Germanikus, wenn sie auf Thusnelda sah (827).

Thusnelda confesses that this event has haunted her until her reunion with her husband, telling Hermann:

Der Triumphwagen lag stets als eine Felsenlast auf mir; doch nun ist er mir Staub, der aus der Blume weht (828).

⁴⁵ According to Kuehnemund, these are "series of dramatic scenes with bardic song interludes" 74.

⁴⁶ Klopstock, *Hermanns Tod*, 811.

In this play, Klopstock presents the couple's reunion as the coming together of two halves. Thusnelda and Hermann are complete only when together.

Unlike in the relationships depicted later by Kleist and Grabbe, the balance of power is split between the couple. Instead of a relationship of male dominance and female submissiveness, each is interested in the welfare and protection of the other. While Hermann shields Thusnelda from the gravity of his wound and their situation, she attempts to protect him from the knowledge of Thumeliko's death, telling him: "Er ist frei, allein Rückskehr in sein Vaterland ist ihm untersagt" (826). Later, both must confess what they try to hide. Thusnelda tells Hermann of his son's fate, a death in front of thousands, stating her belief that Thumeliko died in a Roman arena fighting as a gladiator (832). However, despite this tragic blow, their reunion as a family is complete, with both parents rejoicing in each other and their remaining son. Not yet understanding the peril they are in, Thusnelda confesses to Hermann that she wants above all else to accompany him in battle, a sentiment that will later be echoed by Grabbe's Thusnelda (834).

However, rather than fighting with her husband, she decides to die with him. When Hermann finally informs her that he suspects his death is near at the hands of the tribunal, she expresses her desire to join him in death: "Ja dicht bei dir, da will ich auch sterben!" (849). Thusnelda bravely offers to be her husband's shield and professes the desire to be killed by the same instrument that kills her husband:

Kein Abschied! Kein Abschied! Allein noch viel Umarmungen! Du bist ohne Schild; ich will dir es sein, und die Lanze, welche dich tötet, dringe durch mich! (849).

Hermann is not surprised by her pronouncement, nor does he protest, as her father and the other princes. Instead, he responds with peaceful resign and assurance:

Das letzte, was ich hören will, soll ein Wort von dir sein, und der Klang eines Schwertes (850).

However, Thusnelda informs him that by then, she too will be dead. She is unyielding in her determination to die with him and even when her father offers her protection and happiness in Wasserburg, she refuses it, saying:

Freude? Die ist für mich nicht mehr. Ruh werde ich finden; aber auch die nicht auf der Wasserburg (851).

Segestes makes her this offer twice; however she refuses again, telling him that her life is tied to Hermann's.

Despite her resolve to die with her husband, Thusnelda prostrates herself before the princes and begs for his life, though both Hermann and Theude are displeased with her request (859). Having already decided to die, they view this action as humiliating and degrading. However, this is not the first time Thusnelda has had to beg for life, as she reminds them, and she is willing to offer more than her pride to keep her loved ones alive. Kuehnemund writes that all Klopstock's characters in this play "live, breathe and act like human beings and not like so many embodiments of principles."⁴⁷ Thusnelda's last attempt to save her husband, and thus herself, is full of real emotion and desperation, which perhaps is not fit for a myth-inspired princess but instead is motivated by sincere and human love.

The final scenes result in the demise of Theude, Hermann, and Thusnelda, along with Katwald and Gambriv, who in the last moments of the trial side with Hermann. Though the play is entitled *Hermanns Tod*, it also ends with the death of Thusnelda. She dies, as she had determined, upon being informed of her husband's passing.

Thusnelda plays a substantial role in Klopstock's Hermann dramas. Even in the scenes and in the entire second play from which she is absent, she is remembered for her position as

⁴⁷ Kuehnemund 84.

Hermann's wife and Theude's mother. In the first play, she is a warrior's wife, worrying and waiting for news of his fate. However, she is also the voice of mercy and forgiveness for the traitors Siegmund and Flavius. In the second, she instructs her husband from a distance, telling him to not allow her imprisonment to inhibit his fight for freedom. Her character is further developed in the third, as she courageously defends her husband and sacrificially decides to die with him rather than join her traitor father.

Thusnelda's transformation reflects Butler's writings on gender as a constructed identity that is "tenuously constituted in time." Her actions are not governed by her femininity, rather the audience perceives her as feminine because of her actions. As the relationship between these acts is arbitrary, she is able to break away from the role of the waiting wife and become the woman who offers to serve as her husband's shield. This traditionally masculine act of protection (indeed the trilogy is dedicated to the idea of men fighting to protect their women and children) requires a break from the traditionally feminine role of one in need of protection. Similar to the relationship seen in Lohenstein's novel, Hermann's love for Thusnelda seems to grow when she steps outside of the repetition of feminine acts. As a waiting, submissive wife, she hardly merits a glance from Hermann; however as a strong, patriotic woman, she captures his entire devotion. As we will see in Kleist's play, Thusnelda also turns to masculine acts, but with very different results.

CHAPTER 5

THUSNELDA IN HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S *DIE HERMANNSSCHLACHT*

Written in 1808, Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht* consists of five scenes depicting the political maneuvers of Hermann as he prepares to ambush Varus, the battle, and its aftermath. The drama is divided by two themes: Hermann's attempt to create an allegiance with Marbod in order to defeat Varus and his legions, and Thusnelda's relationship with the Roman envoy Ventidius.

The historical Thusnelda is the wife of Arminius and the daughter of Segestes;⁴⁸ very rarely do we see her represented in the literary tradition as a character in her own right. She is only seen in relation to the leading male characters. In Kleist's play, Thusnelda seems to come into her own in the scenes with the Ventidius. Here we see her pursued by the Roman soldier as a woman, rather than as a wife or daughter. Yet, this portrayal is no less restricting than her other roles. Kleist portrays her as vain and naïve. In her article, "For the Good of the Nation: Woman's Body as Battlefield in Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht*," Barbara H. Kennedy writes:

Hermann's loosely concealed sexism allies him with his male heroic counterpart, Ventidius. Though the two are enemies at the national level, they share a common sexual identity that is based on male domination of the female sex. Both demonstrate this by reducing Thusnelda to the status of a mere object in their games of manipulation and deception.⁴⁹

As we will see, the manipulations of Hermann and Ventidius ultimately serve to undermine Thusnelda's humanity.

⁴⁸ Though Segestes does not play a part in Kleist's play, he is present in the works of Lohenstein, Klopstock, and Grabbe.

⁴⁹ Barbara H. Kennedy, "For the Good of the Nation," 25.

Thusnelda is first introduced with Ventidius and Hermann after a hunting trip. Ventidius has just saved her from an aurochs,⁵⁰ and even Hermann calls this Roman soldier her “Retter.”⁵¹ Their relationship appears to be flirtatious from the start, with Thusnelda telling Scäpio that she had nothing to fear “so lang Ventidius [ihr] zur Seite stand” (8) and later suggestively telling Ventidius, “Ich hätte durch die ganze Nacht, Ventidius! Ventidius! gerufen” (23). Hermann also encourages this relationship, manipulating both parties to serve his own agenda.

The flirtation escalates when Ventidius, under the pretense of desiring a love token, cuts off a lock of Thusnelda’s hair (23-25). Though it is unclear whether Thusnelda is as insulted by this gesture as she claims to be, she demands the return of her hair and then implores Hermann to take action against Ventidius. Hermann, however, sees this event as a political opportunity. He denies Thusnelda’s request, but reminds her not to be fooled by the Roman’s advances, telling her, “Ich liebe meinen Hund mehr, als er dich.” His claim is one of many animal comparisons directed at Thusnelda, which slowly influences her identity.

Despite the unpleasant insinuation, Thusnelda accuses Hermann of being blinded by his hatred of the Romans:

Dich macht, ich seh, dein Römerhaß ganz blind.
Weil als dämonenartig dir
Das Ganz’ erscheint, so kannst du dir
Als sittlich nicht den Einzelnen gedenken (28).

This response echoes Thusnelda’s stance regarding the Romans throughout the play. Much like Klopstock’s Thusnelda, who mediates for the traitors Flavius and Siegmund, she argues for the humanity of the Romans, refusing to take one bad example for the whole. Hermann, on the other hand, takes every opportunity to prove her wrong.

⁵⁰ Extinct ancestor of domesticated cattle, which inhabited Europe, Asia, and North Africa.

⁵¹ Heinrich von Kleist, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, 9.

When Thusnelda attempts to style her hair in the fashion of a Roman woman, Hermann tells her that in Rome, they will cut her hair like a rat. He reminds her of an Ubian woman who was attacked by three Romans and robbed of her hair and teeth. Thusnelda, in disbelief, asks what the Romans do with these personal objects, in response to which Hermann outlines a horrific scenario of mutilation:

Die schmutzigen Haare scheiden sie sich ab,
Und hängen unsre trocken um die Platte!
Die Zähne reißen sie, die schwarzen, aus,
stecken unsre weißen in die Lücken! (41).

He tells Thusnelda that the Romans think of the Germans as less than human—they are beasts. Thusnelda, outraged at this idea, becomes more responsive to Hermann's anti-Roman sentiments:

Nun, meine goldnen Locken kriegt er nicht!
Die Hand, die in den Mund mir käme,
Wie jener Frau, um meiner Zähne;
Ich weiß nicht, Hermann, was ich mit ihr machte.

To which, Hermann responds with more animal references:

Ja, liebste Frau, da hast du recht! Beiß du!
Danach wird weder Hund noch Katze krähen (43).

Hermann encourages Thusnelda to act violently when threatened with violence. If a Roman tries to put a hand in her mouth, she should bite it, like an animal.

However, despite Hermann's stories, Thusnelda refuses to believe every Roman is bad. When Hermann tells her he intends to kill all Romans, including her friend Crassus, and that they must "durch das Schwert der Rache jetzo sterben," she questions his methods:

Crassus? Nein, sag mir an! Mit allen Römern —?
Die Guten mit den Schlechten, rücksichtslos?

To which, Hermann furiously replies with his own argument:

Die Guten mit den Schlechten. — Was! Die Guten!
 Das sind die Schlechtesten!
 Der Rache Keil
 Soll sie zuerst, vor allen andern, treffen!

Thusnelda responds with an example of a “good” Roman, one who risks his own life to save a Thuisikon village child from a fire. Hermann angrily expresses his disdain for this Roman hero:

Er sei verflucht, wenn er mir das getan!
 Er hat, auf einem Augenblick,
 Mein Herz veruntreut, zum Verräter
 An Deutschlands großer Sache mich gemacht!
 Warum setzt’ er Thusikon mir in Brand?
 Ich will die höhnische Dämonenbrut nicht lieben!
 So lang sie in Germanien trotz,
 Ist Haß mein Amt und meine Tugend Rache! (67-68).

Hermann believes “good” Romans are worse, because they have the potential to turn his heart away from his goal. However, even this argument has no effect on Thusnelda and she begs Hermann to spare the life of Ventidius.

It is not until Thusnelda is personally assaulted by Ventidius that Hermann is able to inspire her to hatred and revenge. Hermann informs her that he has intercepted a letter from Ventidius to Livia in Rome, in which Ventidius has included Thusnelda’s lock of hair with the promise that Livia will have it all when Hermann falls to the Romans. As in other examples of Roman atrocity stories throughout the play, whether this letter is actually from Ventidius or is Hermann’s own fabrication is unclear. Regardless of the letter’s creator, Thusnelda is outraged. At Hermann’s offer that one of his officers will take vengeance on Ventidius, she insists that she will avenge herself (73).

Though clearly manipulated by Hermann, it is she who leads Ventidius to his death. In the most violent act of the play, Thusnelda lures Ventidius to a garden where he is mauled by a

she-bear. As Hermann earlier suggested, she indirectly bites the hand that sought to do her harm.

Kennedy writes:

Thusnelda, initially a vain but sympathetic soul, adopts Hermann's hate and need for revenge, as well as his methods for transforming these cruel emotions into brutal action. It is consistent with Hermann's own favored method of combining feigned affection with the deepest hate and violence.⁵²

In this episode, Kleist manages to deconstruct the Klopstockian Thusnelda. In Klopstock's plays, Thusnelda experiences betrayal by her father and hardship under Roman rule, but overcomes this treachery to find a renewed patriotism and love for her husband. Kleist's Thusnelda, however, falters under Ventidius' betrayal and Hermann's manipulations.

However, Thusnelda is not Hermann and the murder of Ventidius is not a political act. She takes revenge against Ventidius for the wrongs he committed against her personally, not because of a new-found nationalism. And unlike Hermann, Thusnelda is personally affected by her actions. As Thusnelda plots Ventidius' murder, her servant warns her of the consequences violence has on the perpetrator:

Die Rache der Barbaren sei dir fern!
Es ist Ventidius nicht, der mich mit Sorg erfüllt;
Du selbst, wenn nun die Tat getan,
Von Reu und Schmerz wirst du zusammenfallen! (91).

Fulfilling her servant's prediction, Thusnelda faints after Ventidius has been killed, illustrating the strain this act of revenge has taken on her. Later, when asked by Hermann if she has kept her word, all she can respond is: "Das ist geschehn. Laß sein" (101). Krimmer writes that:

The Thusnelda-Ventidius subplot suggests that violence not only destroys the life of the victim, but has serious repercussions for the perpetrator as well. In the figure of Thusnelda, *Hermannsschlacht* uses gender to both reveal and contain the devastating impact of war.⁵³

⁵² Kennedy 28.

⁵³ Krimmer 72-72

This event also suggests that a woman's place is not on the battlefield, since a woman is not able to handle the consequences of violent actions. Like Brenno's assertion that Thusnelda is ignorant of the ways of men in Klopstock, Thusnelda's aforementioned conversations with Hermann reflect her naiveté, not only concerning the way prisoners of war are treated but also with regard to her own husband's manipulations. Her relationship with Ventidius suggests her ignorance of political maneuvers. Though she plots Ventidius' downfall, she is not a strategist like Hermann and lacks the complete moral indifference that makes his strategy successful.

There are debates among scholars about the political agenda behind Kleist's portrayal of Hermann and the battle against the Romans. Due to the play's historical context, most agree it was intended to arouse anti-Napoleonic sentiments. In a letter to Heinrich Joseph von Collin, on February 22, 1809, Kleist writes:

Es würde mir, besonders um der letzteren willen (d.h., *Die Hermannsschlacht*), leid tun, wenn die Überlieferung derselben, durch irgend ein Versehen, vernachlässigt worden wäre, indem dies Stück mehr, als irgend ein anderes, für den Augenblick berechnet war, und ich fast wünschen muß, es ganz und gar wieder zurücknehmen, wenn die Verhältnisse, wie leicht möglich ist, nicht gestatten sollten, es im Laufe dieser Zeit aufzuführen.⁵⁴

Also, in a letter to his sister, Ulrike von Kleist, on October 24, 1806, Kleist writes concerning Germany under Napoleonic rule: "Wir sind die unterjochten Völker der Römer."⁵⁵ Many scholars believe the text alludes to current events and Marbod stands for Austria and Hermann for Prussia.⁵⁶ However, if this is the case, who does Thusnelda represent? As Kapczynski points out: "The positions Kleist offers women are only supporting roles: either at the sidelines or in the exalted heights of the nation's pantheon, but never as political actors in their own right."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 821-822.

⁵⁵ Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 771.

⁵⁶ Kuehnemund 94.

⁵⁷ Kapczynski 153.

Thusnelda does not participate in the politics surrounding the battle; rather, she is manipulated by Hermann to play the role he determines for her.

If we bring Butler's gender theory to bear here, we might say that Thusnelda comes to adopt the identity Hermann constructs for her. Hermann repeatedly encourages Thusnelda to pursue the relationship with Ventidius, putting her in a vulnerable position. Then he reinforces her vulnerability by patronizing her, using the diminutive "Thuschen" and "mein Kind" to address his wife. Setting her up for Ventidius' violent end, Hermann also continually refers to her with animal terms, saying she will be sheared bald like a rat by the Romans, his dog is loved more than she is, and she should bite a perpetrator's hand, again like an animal. In the end, Thusnelda recognizes that she has become Hermann's creation, telling Gertrud: "Er hat zur Bärin mich gemacht."⁵⁸

Hebling claims that, Thusnelda's "descent into bestiality is a symbolic re-enactment of man's animal nature in war."⁵⁹ And it is significant that her revenge takes the form of a she-bear. Bears rarely attack humans without provocation, primarily showing aggression if they feel surprised or threatened.⁶⁰ In the intercepted letter to Augustus' wife Livia, Ventidius threatens Thusnelda's person and she responds instinctively, like a bear. Before being threatened, she was like a bear in hibernation, unaware of the schemes of men. She is roused from her slumber to defend herself and her honor. However, unlike her husband, Thusnelda feels remorse for her actions.

Hermann believes the only way to be victorious is to sacrifice the individual for the good of the whole. This is the most apparent in the episode of Hally, in which Hermann brutally illustrates the measures he is willing to take to unite the Germanic tribes and fuel their hatred for

⁵⁸ Kleist 91.

⁵⁹ Robert E. Helbling, *Major Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, 189.

⁶⁰ Stephen Herrero, *Bear Attacks*, 1985.

the Romans. Hally is brought unconscious to the tribe after presumably being raped by Roman soldiers. Upon discovering her identity and the crimes committed against her, her father kills her. Hermann then mutilates Hally's body, having it cut into fifteen pieces to send to the fifteen Germanic tribes as proof of the horrors committed by the Roman troops, regardless of the fact that it is he and Hally's father who commit the greater atrocities of murdering and dismembering the young woman. Hermann tells the people what is to become of Hally's body:

Wir zählen funfzehn Stämme der Germaner;
 In funfzehn Stücke, mit des Schwertes Schärfe,
 Teil ihren Leib, und schick mit funfzehn Boten.
 Ich will dir funfzehn Pferde dazu geben,
 Den funfzehn Stämmen ihn Germaniens zu.
 Der wird in Deutschland, dir zu Rache,
 Bis auf die toten Elemente werben;
 Sturmwind wird, die Waldungen durchsausend,
 Empörung! rufen, und die See,
 Des Landes Ribben schlagend, Freiheit! brüllen (64).

Hermann's efforts are successful and at the end of the play one of the Germanic princes confirms that Hally's body served as a unifying factor, telling Hermann:

Hally, die Jungfrau, die geschändete,
 Die du, des Vaterlandes grauses Sinnbild,
 Zerstückt in alle Stämme hast geschickt,
 Hat unsrer Völker Langmut aufgezehrt.
 In Waffen siehst du ganz Germanien lodern,
 Den Greul zu strafen, der sich ihr verübt (101).

However, women are not the only people used to advance Hermann's schemes, and it can certainly be argued that Hermann calls for sacrifice from the Germanic princes as well:

Kurz, wollt ihr, wie ich schon einmal euch sagte,
 Zusammenraffen Weib und Kind,
 Und auf der Weser rechtes Ufer bringen,
 Geschirre, goldn' und silberne, die ihr
 Besitzt, schmelzen, Perlen und Juwelen
 Verkaufen oder sie verpfänden,
 Verheeren eure Flure, eure Herden

Erschlagen, eure Plätze niederbrennen,
So bin ich euer Mann—

To which Thusikomar, one of the princes, responds incredulously:

Das eben, Rasender, das ist es ja,
Was wir in diesem Krieg verteidigen wollen!

Hermann even calls on the princes to accept defeat in order to gain victory:

Jedoch, will alles zu verlieren bloß
Die Absicht ist (14).

But they are willing participants in his plan, actively sacrificing themselves and their belongings for freedom.

In his book *Manipulation of Reality in Works by Heinrich von Kleist*, Robert E. Clenny notes that:

In *Die Hermannsschlacht* virtually everyone is prey to the machinations of Hermann, who manipulates people, appearances, and events in a skillful orchestration of everything that affects his vision of what Germany ought to be.⁶¹

Unlike the princes, Hally was given no choice in her participation in the battle. The acts done to her body in the name of Germanic unification are one of the many atrocities Hermann commits to serve his ultimate goal of hatred and revenge against the Roman troops, who, as he tells Thusnelda, have infiltrated the body of Germania like a swarm of insects.⁶²

The Hally episode has a Biblical source: In the Book of Judges, Chapter 19, a Levite travels with his wife who is also a concubine and stops to spend the night in Gibeah. They find lodging with an old man; however, the men of the city demand to meet the foreigner so that they can abuse him. The owner of the house refuses to give his guest to the men and instead offers them his daughter or the Levite's wife. When the men continue their demands, the Levite throws his wife outside to them. She is sexually abused throughout the night and then returns to the

⁶¹ Robert E. Glenny, *Manipulation of Reality*, 91.

⁶² Kleist 67.

house, collapsing in front of the door. Upon leaving in the morning, the Levite finds his wife unconscious on the threshold and takes her home where he cuts her body into twelve pieces, and then sends her dismembered parts throughout the territory of Israel. This action later unites the twelve tribes of Israel against the Benjaminites and men of Gibeah to avenge the rape of the Levite's wife. Like the events surrounding Hally's mutilation, the abuse of women is apparent in this account. The honor killing is portrayed as justified despite the Levite's selfish sacrifice of his wife's welfare to save his own person. The similarities between this story and Kleist's suggest the author wished to draw a conscious parallel. However, like in many of his works, Kleist's precise intentions remain unclear. In drawing a parallel between the tribes of Israel and those of Germania, is Kleist suggesting a quasi-religious justification of Hermann's actions? Or is he criticizing the lengths to which these men go for the sake of tribal unification?

Kennedy claims that Kleist's depiction of Hermann may have been an ironic approach toward the extreme nationalism of his time:

Hermann's failure to promise Thusnelda unequivocal protection against the Roman foe reveals the way in which Kleist's Hermann falls short of fulfilling the national heroic ideals of strength, courage, loyalty and unity [...]. The imagery of victimization and the physical act of mutilation serve to position the woman's body as the chief casualty of nationalist favour in the unified male nation state of early nineteenth-century Germany.⁶³

If we adopt this reading, then the story of Hally with its Biblical source would function as a critique of power-driven patriarchal societies and their effects on women. Though women do suffer the most violence in Kleist's play, his letters to his sister and Heinrich Joseph von Collin are concerned with the impact the French occupation has on the German people, not specifically on women. It would be misleading to suggest that Kleist had any feminist intentions when writing his play. I am more in agreement with Elystan Griffiths, who claims that "Kleist

⁶³ Kennedy 30.

criticized the absolutist state for its functionalization of the individual,”⁶⁴ but also argues that “Hermann’s status as a model leader rests precisely on his willingness to break with the chivalrous model of masculine conduct and to mobilize all resources for the national cause”⁶⁵ and that Kleist advocates sacrifice in exchange for victory. In my view, this argument is better supported by the text. Hermann goes as far as to send his own children to Marbod with a dagger, showing his willingness to sacrifice their well being for Marbod’s allegiance.⁶⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising that he uses his wife and another Germanic woman as tools of war, ignoring that these are the people whose freedom he claims to protect.

Regardless of his conscious intentions, Kleist’s play clearly illustrates the detrimental effects violent societies have on the individual, especially women. Krimmer writes:

It is telling that, although the fate of objectification threatens both genders, it befalls only women. Whenever Kleist’s play shows that violence corrupts victim and perpetrator alike and whenever it depicts war’s devastating effects on the individual, it chooses to highlight female victims.⁶⁷

The sacrifice of Hally reveals the destructive effects war has on the individual; she is personally attacked by the invading forces, killed by her father, and her body is violated by her own people. While Hally suffers physical violence, Thusnelda experiences psychological and emotional abuse, highlighting the demoralizing results of a violent society.

Kleist’s *Thusnelda* makes an interesting study because she is not the traditional submissive woman one would expect to find in the early 1800s.⁶⁸ Like Klopstock’s *Thusnelda*, whose political intervention casts a critical light on the Germanic tribes’ martial society, she openly and rightly questions Hermann, his intense nationalism, and his over-arching hatred of

⁶⁴ Elystan Griffiths, *Political Change*, 48.

⁶⁵ Elystan Griffiths, “Hermanns Schlachten,” 118-136.

⁶⁶ Kleist 52-53.

⁶⁷ Krimmer 75.

⁶⁸ Susan L. Cocalis and Kay Goodan, “The Eternal Feminine,” 3-4.

the Romans. However, Kleist deconstructs the humanitarian spokeswoman in Klopstock's play as Thusnelda ultimately falls victim to the violent impulses of her husband and countrymen. Hermann does not attempt to openly control her, but manipulates her indirectly. If it were not for the final scenes of the play, she would be seen as the voice of reason and compassion in contrast to Hermann's Machiavellian plans. However, Kleist does not allow her that opportunity. Once scorned by Ventidius, she forgets her rationalism and an animalistic bloodlust consumes her. Ultimately, Hermann is successful and Thusnelda is defeated. Hermann's cool, dispassionate rationalism gains him victory, while Thusnelda's passion, both in defending the humanity of the Romans and in the affair with Ventidius, is her downfall. She is both the victim of a violent society and the perpetrator of violent actions. Through this complex status she illustrates the dichotomy of the "Eternal Feminine" in literature, in which women are "the natural repository of all the positive and negative attributes of the human race, the source of all hell or of any potential redeeming grace on earth."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Cocalis and Goodan 1.

CHAPTER 6

THUSNELDA IN CHRISTIAN DIETRICH GRABBE'S *DIE HERMANNSSCHLACHT*

Christian Dietrich Grabbe's play *Die Hermannsschlacht* consists of a prologue in which Hermann plots his attack, three days and three nights of battle, and an epilogue, which takes place in Rome. Though written only thirty years after Kleist's play, in 1838, Grabbe's *Hermannsschlacht* and his representation of Thusnelda are starkly different. Part of this difference can be explained by the radically different political context in which Grabbe wrote. Napoleon was no longer the great threat he was in Kleist's time and according to Richard Kuehnemund:

The anger over the French oppressor had already given way in wide circles of Grabbe's generation to a romantic adulation of the dazzling Caesar of yesterday who was fast growing into a heroic legend.⁷⁰

However, Grabbe was familiar with Kleist's representation of the battle. In a letter written to Karl Immermann, he expresses the usefulness of the play, though he has different plans for his own:

Kleists Hermann schicke ich anbei mit Dank zurück. Was ich daraus benutzen konnte, habe ich mir gemerckt. Mein Armin wird aber ganz anders. Ob besser, weiß ich nicht urtheln. Hoff's aber ziemlich stolz, verzeih mir's Gott.⁷¹

Lacking the patriotic enthusiasm of Klopstock and the political fervor of Kleist, Grabbe represents the battle with different motivations. Rather than advocating an uprising against the invading forces like his predecessor, Grabbe's plot contains what Kuehnemund refers to as a "biting bourgeois note" and the manipulative leader of Kleist's play is turned into a

⁷⁰ Kuehnemund 100-101.

⁷¹ In a letter to Karl Immermann (3.30.35) quoted in Otto Nieten, *Chr. D. Grabbe: Sein Leben und Seine Werke*, 345.

“Bauernführer” in Grabbe’s satire. According to Kuehnemund, the play “aims primarily at the renewed calamitous oppression of the German people—though this time not by a wanton intruder from without, but at the hands of their own, hereditary and reactionary leaders.”⁷² Grabbe’s Hermann looks to the peasant world for strength and unity.

Many scholars view *Die Hermannsschlacht* (which was Grabbe’s final play, written while he was sick and dying in Detmold) as the author’s weakest work, lacking the strong characters and depth of his earlier plays.⁷³ Kuehnemund writes that “Grabbe’s generation as a whole had lost its old idealism,” and this lack of enthusiasm is reflected in the play.⁷⁴ Regardless of the critics, Grabbe believed *Die Hermannsschlacht* to be his best work. “Gegen die Hermannsschlacht ist Hannibal nur ein Kind,” he wrote of it. “Die Hermannsschlacht ist in und über mir, wie ein Sternenmeer, wohl mein letzter Trost.”⁷⁵

Although the text is considered by some scholars to be satirical and by others to be patriotic, Roy C. Cowen finds this either-or perspective too limited for a writer of Grabbe’s depth.⁷⁶ The play, he argues, encompasses both elements. It seems to justify both the Roman occupation of Germania and the Germanic response in Rome’s expulsion. While it reinforces ideas of Germanic barbarianism, Cowen asserts:

Far from glorifying the everyday life of the Germanic tribes, Grabbe shows their customs, both appealing and unpleasant, in great detail [...] the picture of the Germans here is far from heroic and, indeed, justifies the Romans’ contempt toward them.⁷⁷

⁷² Kuehnemund 100.

⁷³ Roy C. Cowen, *Christian Dietrich Grabbe*, 149.

⁷⁴ Kuehnemund 102.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Nieten, 345.

⁷⁶ Cowen 150-151.

⁷⁷ Cowen 144.

The Germanic warriors are portrayed as scoundrels, drinking, gambling, and deceiving one another. They care little for Hermann's ideas of unity and are capable of gambling away their families and freedom in a game of chance.

Roger A. Nicholls, on the other hand, finds Grabbe's portrayal of the Germanic warriors as an attempt at realism, rather than a direct criticism:

Grabbe makes his heroes into Lippe peasants with the virtues and weaknesses of their homeland. Simple, narrow-minded and prejudiced, they are also solid, brave, and loyal, deeply attached to the hard and, for southerners like the Romans at least, inhospitable land in which they live.⁷⁸

They are not the idealized heroes found in accounts like Klopstock's; rather they reflect the common man, possessing both his strengths and weaknesses. By de-romanticizing his protagonists, Grabbe rewrites the mythic tale of Germanic heroes fighting a Roman foe into a detailed struggle illustrating an uprising of the people against their oppressors. Grabbe's attempt at realism is reflected in the structure of the play itself. Comprising seventeen scenes that contain a prologue, three days and three nights of battle, and an epilogue, the play is little suited for the stage, but reveals Grabbe's desire to portray real events rather than glorified battles.

The discipline and structure of the Romans serve as an antithesis to the lack of motivation and organization of the Germanic tribes. Similar to Kleist's representation of Germanic-Roman relations, Grabbe's Romans also view the Germanic people as uncultivated brutes, lacking the civilized manners of the Romans. In response to Hermann's question if he is something of a hunter, the praetor tells Hermann: "Pah, der Germane ist noch Barbar, niedriger fast als seine Tiere."⁷⁹ It seems as if the praetor has forgotten that Hermann also belongs to this group. Hermann, reminding the praetor of his heritage and trying to discover where he stands with the

⁷⁸ Roger A. Nicholls, *The Dramas of Christian Dietrich Grabbe*, 245.

⁷⁹ Grabbe, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, 385.

Romans, asks: “Ich auch?” To which the praetor responds that it is not where he was born that matters, but that he was educated in Rome and is knowledgeable of Roman ways:

Du wardst lange in Rom unter den Prätorianern gebildet und exerziert. Du wurdest eine Ausnahme, und Ausnahmen schätzt man so mehr, je seltner sie sind (385).

The praetor considers Hermann the exception; the rest of the Germanic people are like animals and should be treated as such.

However, the Romans’ brutality is not only directed at their enemies; it extends to their own people as well. Grabbe opens the play with an example of the Romans’ cruelty and harsh discipline among their legions. In the first scene, a Roman soldier is flogged and killed for resting and asking for a piece of bread (367-368). In the third, a praetor gives a woman’s children to the state to fight for Rome rather than granting her request for child support from the children’s father (378-380). In this play, Hermann does not have to invent the atrocities of the Romans or create examples of their cruelty. Yet there is little evidence that these factors are intended to foster patriotism or unity as they did in Kleist’s text. The Romans’ strict adherence to rules, violent treatment of their own people, and assumption that customs they do not understand are inferior to their own justifies Hermann’s trickery and underlines the need for a united nation, which is ruled by its own people rather than foreign forces.

The most vocal advocate of nationalism in Grabbe’s text is not found in Hermann, but rather in the character of Thusnelda. Grabbe modeled her character after his mother and the Meierfrau von Sültehofe,⁸⁰ both of whom were of Lippe peasant stock, and he relished the idea of bringing Detmold to the forefront of his drama through these current references.⁸¹ Otto Nieten describes the personality traits of the Meierfrau von Sültehofe that are reflected in the character

⁸⁰ According to a footnote in *Werke in einem Band*, Volume 6 by Walther Vontin on page 547, this reference is to Johanne Friederike Henriette Sültemeier, a widow whose case Grabbe presided over while an advocate in Detmold.

⁸¹ Karl Ziegler, *Grabbe's Leben und Charakter*, 173.

of Thusnelda: “Sie ist karg und mild—das eine durch die karge Natur, das andere durch ihr Herz. Ganz urwüchsig und selbstverständlich ist ihre Freiheitsliebe.”⁸²

Unlike Kleist’s Thusnelda, Grabbe’s heroine takes a great interest in the fight and politics. However, like Klopstock’s Thusnelda, she does not actively participate in the battle. Instead, she serves her people through her domestic responsibilities. According to Kuehnemund, Thusnelda:

Dutifully performs the trying functions of the absent country squire’s spouse in the kitchen, hoe and barn; though she also bears some features of a Northern Amazon and is quite able to put her country’s welfare far above all human relationships.⁸³

Thusnelda is introduced in the play as a patriotic housewife, serving her country by serving soup. Thusnelda rarely makes an appearance in the play without offering some form of nourishment. In light of Butler’s theory of gender, Grabbe’s construction of Thusnelda’s gender identity is through the stylized repetition of these acts of domesticity. As we will see, throughout the play she is continuously portrayed as a submissive caregiver, rather than an autonomous being.

Though Thusnelda’s sphere is the home, she is forced to answer for her husband’s political stance as well as her own. When Varus asks Thusnelda if she is on the Roman side, like her husband, she answers cleverly and carefully:

Mich wundert die Frage. Wie sollt und müßt ich nicht? Ich bin nur Hermanns Hausfrau, er ist der eurige, und was er denkt und tut muß mir Gesetz sein (377).

By answering vaguely, she manages to avoid lying directly to Varus, but also leads him to make a false assumption. As Varus believes Hermann is on his side, Thusnelda’s answer convinces him of her loyalty. However, neither Hermann nor Thusnelda support Roman occupation. Her

⁸² Nieten 354.

⁸³ Kuehnemund 101.

statement is more than a political ploy. She sheds light on her own constructed identity—through her husband—as Hermann’s housewife and without her own autonomy.

She immediately regrets her dishonesty to the Roman leader and, in a true display of patriotism, proclaims her desire to defend her people as a warrior:

Ich heuchelte Freundlichkeit, und mache mir nun Vorwürfe. Still ihr Nachkläffer im Busen! – Wodan, strafe mich, erlöse nur das Land um dessentwillen ich log – Meine Berge mit den prächtigen Waldkämmen wollen sie niedertreten, unsre braven Burschen sollen in ihren Schlachtlinien dienen und verbluten – Ich leids nicht, und gibt Hermann die Schmach zu, werd ich der Kämpfer: Ich! (377).

These, however, are empty words. In order fight, she must be a man—“ein Kämpfer.” She does not wish to be “eine Kämpferin,” which suggests that it is not her status that disables her from fighting, but her gender. Both Klopstock’s and Grabbe’s Thusneldas express a desire to fight for their country, but do not act on their wishes. Is this the authors’ attempt to emancipate them from traditional roles of femininity? Or is it merely to express the sentiments of good patriotic housewives—words of patriotism without actively crossing any gender boundaries? Perhaps Klopstock’s Thusnelda, who openly participates in political discussion and offers to be her husband’s shield, would fight if given the opportunity. But outside of this comment (spoken as an aside to herself), Grabbe’s Thusnelda shows little inclination to break out of her constructed identity.

This is not the only instance we see Thusnelda loyally serving her people through her domestic status. During the first day of the battle, Thusnelda brings Hermann and his men food, drink, and twenty thousand men. Hermann is both shocked and proud to see his wife riding into battle, saying:

Mein Weib, bei mir in der Stunde der Gefahr! – Und fürchtest du nicht vor den römischen Geschossen? (410).

To which Thusnelda responds as a courageous Germanic wife, telling him that she has nothing to fear as long as she is with him. Her brave response brings her the praises of Ingomar, who tells Hermann:

Deine Frau ist kein Weib ... Doch gegen ihre Stirn tausch ich nicht die Sonne,
nicht den Blitz gegen ihr Lächeln, und ihren Mut und Verstand betreffend (411).

She is praised for her bravery and intelligence, however, does not actively fight in the battle. Nevertheless, she is a vital participant in the surrounding events. Not only does she deceive Varus and her father, she also brings reinforcements to Hermann. Hermann gives her instructions to have the Roman roads destroyed while he leads the Romans to the Harz Mountains. However, it must be noted that she fulfills these roles only at Hermann's request and rarely at her own initiative. Her agency is derived from Hermann and only extends as far as he allows it.

Unlike Kleist's Thusnelda, who is intrigued by the Roman ways, Grabbe's Thusnelda shows her disdain for Roman materialism, telling Hermann, "Deine neue römische Ritterrüstung blendet." He explains that Augustus sent him the signet ring, provoking exclamations of despair from his wife. She believes this ring symbolizes the enslavement of the Germanic people:

Wehe, Weh! Der erste im heißen Süden geschmiedete Ring, der dich, mich, den
ganzen Norden an Italien kettet.

Unaware of Hermann's deception, she reproaches him for his Roman allegiance, telling him:

Freilich, ein Vaterlandsverräter ist der Träne nicht wert. Wer aber kann sie
zurückhalten?

And she accuses him of being nothing more than a butterfly with colorful wings:

Du! Erneidrigt durch diese goldnen Schuppen zu einem Goldkäfer! Bist du ein
echter Held in Eisen oder ein austischer Schmetterling in bunten Flügeldecken?

Though this scene depicts her boundless patriotism, it also illustrates her ignorance of the ways of war and the fact that, despite her expressions to participate in battle, as a woman she is

incapable of the dissimulation of men. Hermann highlights this unawareness by asking her: “Fürstin und Frau, kennst du Fürsten und Männer?” (386-387). The other Germanic warriors understand that Hermann is playing both sides for tactical reasons, but Thusnelda, perhaps due to her innocent nature, has difficulty comprehending this duplicity.

Thusnelda’s ignorance of the ways of men and her guilelessness are also reflected in the scenes with her father, Segestes. Hermann instructs her to lie to her father about his plans, to which she obediently responds, “Held, ich werde nach Kräften deine Gebote erfüllen” (388). When her father visits her, she feigns weakness and anxiety over Hermann’s fate with the Romans. However, despite her endeavors, Segestes is not fooled and is aware Hermann is no friend of the invading army. This scene functions not only to relate Tacitus’ account that Segestes believed his daughter to have been kidnapped by Hermann,⁸⁴ but also to show the effects participating in Hermann’s deceptions has on Thusnelda’s character. Otto Nieten proposes that this event causes the evolution of Thusnelda from a Germanic housewife who worries over her domestic duties to a woman whose only concern is for the welfare of the troops:

Vor allem aber hat Grabbe ihre Charakteristik herausgearbeitet auf die deutsche Hausfrau, die auf Sitte und Zucht hält und die ihrem Gesinde imponiert. Daß sie vor ihrem Vater heucheln muß, raubt ihr für einen Augenblick die Fassung derart, daß sie ihren hausfraulichen Pflichten vergißt und diese sind ihr doch so in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen, daß sie am Schlusse der Hermannsschlacht sich um nichts kümmert, als um die Bewirtung der Helden. Sie ist nicht züchtig sittsam, sondern herb und stolz.⁸⁵

After the encounter with her father, Thusnelda appears briefly during the first day of battle to bring Hermann more men and food. Then, on the third night, following the Germanic victory, she sends a messenger inviting the men to eat and drink in celebration with her.⁸⁶ However, this does not mean she has left behind convention, as Nieten suggests, but rather that her hospitality

⁸⁴ Grabbe 395 and Tacitus *The Annals I*, 55, 336-337.

⁸⁵ Nieten 354.

⁸⁶ Grabbe 447.

and care now extend beyond the boundaries of the home to the fighting warriors. She still performs the same actions, just in a new location.

Prior to the conversation with her father, we see Thusnelda not only as a devoted housewife, but also as a doting mother. In contrast to Kleist's play, where Thusnelda is rarely seen in relation to her children, Grabbe shows the relationship between Thusnelda and her son Thumelico in two scenes.⁸⁷ In the first, Thusnelda provides her son with food, telling him: "Iß, trink und freue dich des Augenblicks ehe die schweren Jahre kommen" (386). Here she is not only a loving mother, but again a provider of nourishment, as illustrated in other scenes. Her seemingly cheery advice masks the foreboding of the difficult years to come.

In the sixth scene, she shows her dedication, both to her son and to her people's freedom as well. She tells Thumelico:

Kind, ich bin zu froh. Nicht wahr, nun wirst du zehntausend Jahr alt, wie deines Vaters Lorbeerkrantz, welcher ewig jendlich und Frisch die befreiten Völker umgrünen, beschatten und bei Freiheitskämpfen umsäuseln wird?

To which Thumelico responds with patriotic fervor reflecting his age: "Ja. Mutter, wenns geht, werd ich gern so alt" (394). Thumelico answers as the child of a Germanic warrior and shows that Thusnelda has passed down ideas of nationalism for posterity.

Motherhood is one of the many feminine ideals embodied by Grabbe's Thusnelda. She is also modest, loyal, and vulnerable—traits which Hermann tells his men they are fighting to protect. After bringing the men food on the first day of battle, Thusnelda falls asleep, prompting Hermann to use her as a motivation for battle:

Die Fürstin, welche euch im Kampfe Lebensmittle brachte, schläft im Vertrauen auf eure Waffen – Wer stritte nicht für ihren Schlaf und ihren Schutz? (100).

⁸⁷ Scenes 4 and 6.

We see women used as motivators for battle in Klopstock's and Kleist's versions of the Hermann story as well. However, Thusnelda is not Helen and most authors do not try to cast the Teutoburg battle as a fight for love. It is portrayed as a defensive maneuver to oust the brutal Romans from Germania. But the soldiers are fighting to defend their women or take revenge for wrongs done to them. These themes of protection and retaliation often eclipse the more idealistic notion of fighting for freedom from oppression. Perhaps if Thusnelda had been given more autonomy, the Germanic fight for personal liberty would not be undermined by the subjugation of their own people.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

While Thusnelda also plays a role in many other representations of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest and its surrounding events, including Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau poem in Alexandrine verse in 1725, Justus Möser “Arminius” tragedy in 1749, and Christoph Martin Wieland’s epic and tragic love story “Hermann” published posthumously in 1882, she is rarely a major character in these works. Her character is only seen in relation to the leading male characters as a wife, mother, or daughter. She is a tool of war, used by her father as a means of political advancement and an object of barter, by her husband as motivation for battle, and by the community as a possession, which deserves protection. A voice of patriotism, she is as devoted to her country as she is to her husband. More often than not she is portrayed heroically as possessing all the positive virtues of her sex.

To entertain the nobility of Lohenstein’s time, she is a brave warrior and passionate woman. In Klopstock’s works, she fights outside of the battle, arguing for forgiveness and mercy. Kleist illustrates the dehumanizing effects of war on the individual as Thusnelda’s belief in humanity turns into the fury of the scorned woman. By Grabbe’s time, she is the quintessential patriotic housewife, supporting her husband and serving meals to the troops. Her development in the nineteenth century reflects that of the bourgeois woman in general. With the formalization of the housewife role, Thusnelda’s power is delegated to the private sphere as she loses influence within the public and political worlds. No matter how glorified her domestic and nurturing

abilities are by the poets, they are overshadowed by the martial and political exploits of her husband.

Following Grabbe's time, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the foundation of the German empire inspired national pride. In 1875, the Hermann Monument in the Teutoburg Forest was dedicated as a national shrine. In 1909, there were celebrations of the nineteenth hundredth anniversary of Hermann's victory. During the First World War, Hermann was looked to for inspiration.⁸⁸ Later, the National Socialists found ideas within the Hermann dramas to support their nationalistic agendas. Grabbe's *Die Hermannsschlacht* became the most performed of his plays.⁸⁹ Over a hundred years after its first publication, the play was performed frequently under the Third Reich and determined by the press to be "the most German of all German plays."⁹⁰ Grabbe's theme of the *Volk-Führer-Heimat* relationship attracted the National Socialists.⁹¹ We can imagine that his representation of Thusnelda also appealed to the party. Unlike the Thusnelda figures in Klopstock and Kleist, who often stand in opposition to Hermann and criticize the martial society to which they belong, Grabbe's Thusnelda is the quintessential, submissive housewife. In 1934, Hitler's chief propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, told a group of women leaders that their responsibility was to their homes:

Woman's proper sphere is the family. There she is a sovereign queen. If we eliminate women from every realm of public life, we do not do it in order to dishonor her, but in order that her honor be restored to her.⁹²

Thusnelda, who in Grabbe's text illustrates a strong, albeit confined female character, could be reinterpreted under the new regime to depict the appropriate sphere of a woman's influence.

⁸⁸ Kuehnemund 105-106.

⁸⁹ Cohen 161.

⁹⁰ Kuehnemund 121.

⁹¹ Kuehnemund 107.

⁹² Quoted in Hilda Browning, *Women under Fascism and Communism*, 8.

This nationalistic perversion of the *Hermannsschlacht*'s patriotic themes explains the decline of Hermann and Thusnelda literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As new generations of Germans attempt to distance themselves from their fascist past, they have also broken ties with their Germanic heritage. However, as long as the themes of human liberty and overcoming oppression are relevant, this story will continue to find a literary voice.

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