

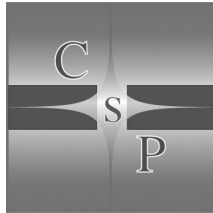
Dismemberment in Drama /  
Dismemberment of Drama



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Edited by

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Dismemberment in Drama / Dismemberment of Drama, Edited by Lance Norman

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## INTRODUCTION

# DISMEMBERMENT IN DRAMA / DISMEMBERMENT OF DRAMA

LANCE NORMAN

In November 2006, the Midwest Modern Language Association drama panels interrogated the potential of dismemberment inherent in the dramatic text and the theatrical event. Dismemberment is integral to understanding the theatrical experience and the theatre as performance space. However, there does not seem to be much agreement as to how dismemberment impacts the theatre. Is the theatre in need of dismemberment to become useful to society as suggested by Bertolt Brecht, or is Antonin Artaud closer to the mark when he characterizes a theatre that has been dismembered for too long? The lavish spectacles of Robert Wilson and the deconstruction of the canonical by the Wooster Group are just two contemporary examples of the inherent potential of dramatic performance as dismemberment. The conference drama panels took it as a guiding assumption that dismemberment in performance does not transform the dramatic text. Dismemberment has always been fundamental to drama. Representations of dramatic dismemberment appear with a consistency regardless of historical period or national boundary: the dismembering of Pentheus which concludes Euripides's *The Bakkhai*, the dismemberment and cannibalism which constitute the final act of revenge in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the dismembered bodies in Kleist's romantic fantasies, dismemberment as a means of interconnecting theory and practice in the work of Artaud, and the proliferation of dismemberment in the contemporary drama of Sarah Kane, Marina Carr, and Martin McDonagh were just some of the most talked about examples at the conference.

The essays which make up *Dismemberment in Drama / Dismemberment of Drama* begin with representations of dismemberment in drama, and explore dismemberment as meta-theatrical emblem. They ask: What does dismemberment tell us about drama? What does

dismemberment tell us about the relationship between dramatic text and performance event? What do representations of dismemberment within a play illuminate about the structure of the play itself? Is it possible to dismember audience from performance event? What might it mean to dismember the voice? Are dismemberment and memory antithetical terms or interconnected? Taken as a whole, these essays suggest that dismemberment in drama helps us understand the nature and limits of performance.

The emergence of performance studies in the latter part of the twentieth-century has transformed our understanding of performance from a theatrical issue to an issue important to understanding identity, human interaction and the world at large. In a performative frame identity is the playing of roles. Personality itself becomes nothing more than the adopting of roles based on cues provided by specific situations. Such an understanding of the world conceptualizes performance as dismemberment. If personality and identity occur in a series of present gestures, the individual ceases to be understood as something stable across time, and becomes a shifting conglomeration of present performances. Bearing this in mind, these essays balance discussions of the dramatic and the theatrical with the knowledge that theatrical representation is neither a sterile nor an empty gesture. There is always something that is being represented, and someone who is viewing representation as process.

This collection tries to reach a better understanding of drama as a form by balancing discussions of the performative potential of dismemberment with examinations of the impact of dismemberment to the body and representations of the body. By focusing on dismembered bodies these essays ask what does a damaged body mean? Is a dismembered body always a site of horror, or is there a potential liberation intrinsic in dismemberment? Is it possible to fully understand the sight of dismemberment or does a damaged body always evoke what the witness is fundamentally unable to grasp?

“Part One: Dismembering Aesthetics” brings together essays on German Romanticism, French Surrealism, and the contemporary Irish Theatre. Individually and collectively these essays dismember aesthetics in that they problematize efforts to imagine dramatic form in terms of dialectical opposition, and point the way toward dismemberment as an aesthetic category in its own right. More than the sum of the individual chapters, when looked at together these essays suggest that dismemberment is a dramatic trope that transcends national boundary, or narrowly defined literary movement.



In “Dissecting Opposition: The Romantic Dialectic on its Last Legs in Zacharias Werner and Heinrich von Kleist,” Amy Emm outlines the typical understanding of the Romantic project as a dialectic between the fragmented and thus monstrous body, and the power of the imagination to create an idealized wholeness. This desired for unity – following in the footsteps of Schlegel – would often take the form of an expanding circle moving toward the unattainable and inaccessible Absolute. These ideals were most often expressed in novels and fragments due to the dominance of the neo-classical closed dramatic form. Emm notes how approaches to bring the Romantic ideal to drama and to open up the dramatic form were considered experimental failures: “The writing of drama is thus by most accounts a wrongheaded approach to Romanticism: a perverse practice that distorts the relationship between center and periphery.” Emm goes on to reclaim drama as integral to the Romantic project by analyzing the work of Zacharias Werner, and Heinrich von Kleist: “Kleist and Werner transform the formal dismemberment of drama into images of physical dismemberment in *Käthchen* and *Sons*.” By focusing on the fragmented body Emm explains how these images of dismemberment – broken limbs, prosthetics, and holes in Kleist, and decapitated heads in Werner – critique and dismember a dialectic by offering multiple and diverse visions of German Romanticism.

Emm’s exploration of nineteenth-century German drama is followed by Thomas Crombez’s “The Dismembered Body in Antonin Artaud’s Surrealist Plays.” Crombez argues for an historical understanding of Antonin Artaud and the human limbs which rain down on the stage in plays such as *Le Jet de sang* and *La Conquête du Mexique*. Returning Artaud and his drama to the surrealist movement from which it emerged offers an alternative to the poststructuralist approaches which have come to dominate Artaud studies, and may resolve the “conceptual ambiguities” which such approaches provoke and perpetuate. Poststructuralist criticism of Artaud focuses on the dramatist’s life and tends to uncritically adapt Artaud’s poetic and metaphysical terminology. Such a project leads to a metaphorical understanding of the body parts which litter Artaud’s stage. Crombez offers a more literal reading of these dismembered limbs to suggest that first and foremost Artaud’s images were unstageable anywhere but in the “playhouse of the mind’s eye.” Borrowing a term from Jarrey studies, Crombez understands Artaud’s mental drama as engaging in appropriation that can be described as “the systematically wrong style,” and that “[t]o interpret Artaud’s hailstorms of human limbs in a literal, instead of a strictly metaphorical way, we need to see that his

work constituted the most thorough application of surrealist principles such as subversion and demoralization.”

Kristina Banister Quynn’s “Split the Difference: Third Legs and Incest in Later-Twentieth-Century Irish Drama” concludes Part One. Quynn locates separation and difference as integral to theatrical efforts to create an authentic Irishness and imagine a unified nation. From the debut of the Abbey Theatre, dramatizing distinctions between Irish and British has been crucial to Irish self-representation. Such a self-representation relies on internal as well as external difference. A dominant trend in Irish drama’s self-representation of nation can be understood as a “masculinist imaginary” that requires internal opposition to maintain its imaginary wholeness. Viewed in such a light, Irish theatre presents a fractured identity that perpetually presents Irishness and nation as undone. Stepping back from the compulsion to view such dismemberment in terms of community, Quynn takes the inverse approach by suggesting that the fragmentation of contemporary Irish theatre cannot be explained solely in terms of Irishness: “The work of Frank McGuinness, Enda Walsh and Marina Carr, however, breaks away from of Irish Theatre’s national haunting to a preoccupation with the personal, the particular and the gendered.” In an understanding of Irishness that combines the personal and the national, the dismembered bodies of McGuinness, Walsh, and Carr “redistribute sex and gender binaries to speak of particular and situated Irishness organized around divisions of sexual orientation, sexual difference and self.”

“Part Two: Voicing Dismemberment” explores the complex and at times contradictory relationship between dismemberment and the voice. Each of these essays approaches the very concept of the voice differently as they in turn understand the voice as belonging to a “real world” speaker whose utterance is dismembered by the mimetic understanding that is inherent in the theatrical event, a hearing character who may be able to overcome the destruction of dismemberment, and an uttering character who enunciates the very form of theatrical dismemberment. Taken together these divergent approaches form their own chorus and suggest the voice is a multi-faceted process. Perhaps to fully understanding the voicing of theatrical dismemberment requires a simultaneous awareness of mimesis, receiver, and source of utterance.

In “Harvesting the Voice: Manufacturing the Documentation in Documentary Theater,” Brian D. Holcomb understands documentary theatre as a genre based on dismemberment. Similar to a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, documentary theatre tends to be understood as different from historical theatre. Documentary theatre dramatizes “found”

documents such as “real world” interviews and texts where a historical theatre creates a new dramatic text based on a historical event. Dramatizing these “found” documents – creating a documentary theatre event – is a dismemberment in that the event is ripped out of its social context, and placed in the context of a theatrical performance. The voice of a speaker is transformed and deformed as it is no longer uttered by the person who originally spoke it, but instead emanates from the phenomenological body of an actor playing a role. Holcomb notes that the documentary drama of Anna Deavere Smith and Moisés Kaufman complicates this vision of documentary theatre. Rather than dismembering “found” voices, Smith and Kaufman conduct their own interviews strictly for the purpose of theatrical performance, and in so doing, harvest voices rather than find them. However, this is where the similarities between the two documentary dramatists end. Smith plays all the roles herself, and thereby emphasizes the Brechtian dismembering distance between performer and “real world” source, while Kaufman minimizes such distance, highlighting a realist documentary theatre, and subverting the dismemberment that is inherent to documentary theatre. Comparing these two diverging documentary projects Holcomb recognizes that “[t]heater has the potential to allow interrogation, both by the actors and by the audience, and thus has the potential to come to different, more complex conclusions, or even not to conclude at all. This potential is not always embraced, which squanders the potential for complexity in favor of the single voice.”

In “Statues, Jars, and Other Stored Treasures,” Johanna Frank shifts the register of the discussion from dismemberment of the voice to dismemberment and the voice. By so doing, Frank confronts the potential of the voice as a performative as well as a mimetic phenomena. For while Holcomb calls attention to the inherent dismemberment that occurs when non-theatrical voices are placed in performative setting, Frank focuses on the dismemberment and the theatrical voice by considering the voice solely in terms of its performative utterance. Frank argues that the embodied figures in the plays of Adrienne Kennedy and Suzan-Lori Parks dramatize “a relationship between disparate parts.” This dismemberment rejects a unified identity, and is temporal as well as material, disrupting memory, and fragmenting past, present, and future. Frank complicates the conception of the voice by emphasizing that the voice is part of a system. This allows us to see that “contemporary drama has the potential to intervene in the violence of dismemberment by positing voice as bound not to the body that is the source of voice but to the body of its receptor.” In this dismembering of our typical understanding of the voice by rejecting

the ownership of the one who utters lies the possibility to overcome the import of fragmented bodies in favour of a more productive suturing of listening body and voice.

My essay, “Metatheatrically Speaking: Dismembering Sights and Classical Messages” concludes Part Two. I analyze the dismemberment intrinsic to the Messengers’ utterances which are so fundamental to classical theatre. Rather than examining Euripides’ *Medea* and *The Bakkhae*, and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in their historical context, I consider the impact of these plays on a contemporary audience. In the aftermath of the contemporary theatre’s visual representation of graphic violent content, the vocal utterances of classical drama’s messengers call attention to the bodily dismemberment that is described but remains unstaged. These representations of dismemberment uttered but unstaged creates an off-stage idealized metatheatre of the mind. The Messengers do not just describe bodies falling apart, they describe bodies falling apart as theatrical event. That is to say, the Messengers describe off-stage theatrical events in which they are spectators viewing a performance of dismemberment. The Messengers’ dismembering utterances create idealized theatres of the mind precisely to the degree that they are able to describe a firm divide between spectator and the performance of fragmenting bodies. This dismembering theatre becomes a dismembering of theatrical form as well as content. To fully understand the messages we are told requires a spectator to recognize the bond between spectator and performance are tenuous, and spectators inevitably run the risk of being absorbed in the performances they witness.

The essays that form “Part Three: Dramatizing Dismemberment” all understand dramatic dismemberment as a theatrical event. More than a textual representation, dramatic dismemberment must be understood as part of a performance event. Performance involves spectators who witness a theatrical event, and understand they are witnessing a theatrical event. This theatrical event is the materiality of performers who commit and make sense of their performances through the sheer weight of material presence. These essays suggest that this interaction between spectators who know they are spectating and performers who create a performance through their material action is where the dismemberment of drama is enacted.

Craig N. Owens’s translation of Eric W. Sagnon’s “Theater Blows [*Coups de théâtre*]” theorizes that there is a paradoxical gap or rupture intrinsic to theatrical performance. Rather than viewing attempts to overcome the spatial and conceptual distance between spectator and staged event as the essence of theatricality, Sagnon suggests that such efforts

merely reinscribe the distance between spectator and performance event and illuminates that “performance is an event intervention into which is impossible because it is unthinkable.” A gap is necessary for performance to occur. To even think about intervening in a performance disrupts such a gap, marks the limits of performance, and transforms performance into non-performance. Sagnon reconsiders the various theatrical innovations and theorizations that are the history of twentieth-century theatre including the radical theatrical groups in the United States in the 1960’s that struggled to actualize an authentic and total theatre. Sagnon argues that “for all its dreams of breaking the boundaries between performance and life, between acted role and true identity, between spectator and performance, in actual fact the practice of total or environmental theater simply pushed those limits outward.” The dismemberment in contemporary British theatre is not much different. The drama of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill – among others – manifests similar compulsions to those of the total theatre.

In “Disrememberment,” Judith Roof argues that the psychoanalytic system that underpins dramatic dismemberment “parallels the dynamic of the subject itself.” Disrememberment is the process of forgetting that the subject is defined by its fragmentary nature. This active failure to recognize dismemberment as the essence of the subject allows the subject to imagine being in terms of integration and wholeness. Roof suggests that “[a]s the emblematic forgetting of pieces and parts in favor of illusory order and organization, disrememberment is a constant, persistent pressure that participates in a perpetual present, a perpetual forgetting that there is neither order nor organization at all.” Dramatic dismemberment from Sophocles’ *Oedipus* to Harold Pinter to Sarah Kane repeatedly performs this disrememberment as the protagonists are forced to move from the disrememberment that allows the phantasy of wholeness to remembering their fragmentary essence. Dismemberment becomes indivisible from the subject. In the ironic structure of disrememberment “[t]he insight of his [Oedipus’s] blindness—his open dismemberment—enables the continued blindness of our insight whose first job it is to hide our similarity to Oedipus under our recognition that we are Oedipus, to disguise his resistance to unrepresion in our sage contemplation of his repression.”

Concluding the collection is *SteinSemble*’s “Performing Dismemberment.” *SteinSemble* is a performance group that stages under performed and under theorized twentieth-century avant-garde and modern drama. Structured as a series of dramatic scenes, this collaborative essay questions the essence of theatrical dismemberment in some of the group’s recent productions. Focusing on plays such as Tristan Tzara’s *The Gas*

*Heart*, and Gertrude Stein's *Counting Her Dresses*, *SteinSemble* considers performance as a historical fact rather than a theoretical methodology, and wonders what the material certainty of performance reveals about dramatic dismemberment. Tzara and Stein's plays are made up of what seems to be random language. However, by putting these plays and perhaps any plays on their feet, they cannot do anything but create a kind of sense. This intelligibility is more musical than narrative and involves the voice of a material body connecting to another material body. Performance works to create possibilities that textual representation cannot access. This understanding of performance as a sense making process suggests that performing dismemberment works against itself. The materiality of performance forces performance to reject its own fragmentation.

**PART I:**  
**DISMEMBERING AESTHETICS**

## CHAPTER ONE

# DISSECTING OPPOSITION: THE ROMANTIC DIALECTIC ON ITS LAST LEGS IN ZACHARIAS WERNER AND HEINRICH VON KLEIST

AMY EMM

Ideal human form has long been associated with the circle, one of the most ancient and persistent tropes of unity. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the roman architect Vitruvius laid out the circular proportions of the body: “In the human body the central point is naturally the navel. For if man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described there from”. (3.1.3)<sup>1</sup> According to Vitruvius, the body also traces a square, but in the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic traditions, Renaissance thinkers interpret the circular proportions of the body as analogous to the divine, thus the square tends to recede into the background in their illustrations. The eighteenth century ideal of physical perfection follows in this tradition. Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s studies of classical art propagated the classical Greek body as a model of simplicity, unity and harmony. Winckelmann’s completing gaze intuitively reconstructs the Greek body from fragmented sculpture and restores its context and essence. The notion of the mind’s eye as a completing organ also informs the Romantic discourse of imagination, which holds that poetic vision can restore real and ideal to universal oneness.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge describes the role of poetry as transformation of a series “into a *Whole*” and of sequential events into “a *circular motion*”.<sup>3</sup> However, the Romantic body stands in contradiction to the period’s organic ideals as a site of subconscious and polymorphous desire that questions central tenets like “subjective coherence and imaginative mastery”.<sup>4</sup> Hence while Romanticism preserves an ideal of unity, the body becomes monstrous, mechanical or mysteriously doubled. In this vein, imagery of dismemberment arises in two plays from the middle of the German Romantic period: namely Zacharias Werner’s two-



part historical play, *The Sons of the Valley* from 1803/4,<sup>5</sup> and Heinrich von Kleist's historical knightly drama,<sup>6</sup> *Käthchen of Heilbronn or the Trial by Fire* of 1808.<sup>7</sup> In *Sons of the Valley*, the Templar Knights worship devils' heads and lose their spiritual "head", the grand master, as punishment. Kleist's *Käthchen* constructs its heroines with imagery of prostheses, broken legs, and fragmented classical statues. Through disembodied heads and limbless torsos, these plays explore the disjunction between Romantic corporeality and ideality.

The German Romantics respond to a post-Kantian world of insurmountable oppositions by striving to express an ultimate, if unattainable, unity of experience and essence, subject and object, nature and the Absolute. Romantic ruminations on universality naturally take on circular form. Authors of the period wrote constantly about circles, ellipses, orbits and eccentricity and used these figures in their literary forms. Friedrich Schlegel's influential concept of Romantic irony, for instance, relies on a constant turning between contradictory and yet mutually supporting poles, so that progress towards the inaccessible Absolute succeeds in an expanding circle, a spiral.<sup>8</sup> In order to express open circling towards the ineffable, the Romantics preferred the novel and the fragment to neo-classical drama's closed form of beginning, middle and end. The best known Romantic attempts to open up dramatic form explode it with meta-theatrics and unstageable amalgams of narrative prose and dialogue. Comedies by Ludwig Tieck come the closest to Romanticism's canonical core, yet they represent "wildly eccentric literary experiments",<sup>9</sup> in which theatrical space radically expands.<sup>10</sup> Detlef Kremer registers similar extremism in the sharply "grotesque staging" of Achim von Arnim's *Halle und Jerusalem* (1811).<sup>11</sup> Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) deals not only with a monstrous incest, but its protagonist is compared to a meteor, the most erratic cosmic body.<sup>12</sup> In a further provocative parallel, F. J. Lamport deems Kleist a "Prussian meteor" with regard to his dramatic works.<sup>13</sup> The writing of drama is thus by most accounts a wrongheaded approach to Romanticism: a perverse practice that distorts the relationship between center and periphery. But perverse dramatic curves constitute an effort to engage with the particularity and insurmountable oppositions that the Romantic circle otherwise subsumes or ignores. Kleist and Werner transform the formal dismemberment of drama into images of physical dismemberment in *Käthchen* and *Sons*. This essay explores how physical dismemberment emanates from structural and thematic ambiguities that impede dialectical progress. As they round off the body, these authors dissect the oppositions that sustain Romantic

spiraling and point to the formal and ethical dilemmas raised by the Romantic aesthetic of harmony and organic unity.

*Käthchen of Heilbronn* is a textual body riddled with holes. The play opens in a hole in the earth, where Count Wetter von Strahl is tried for bewitching the bourgeois maiden Käthchen into doggedly following him around the countryside. The two are actually in love and have met in a dream, although Strahl doesn't remember and Käthchen refuses to publicly fill in the blanks (line 436-7). The lacuna echoes through the trial: a judge likens the cave setting to the cavity of the human breast; and Käthchen's father testifies that a hole in Strahl's armor brought him into his smithy, after which Käthchen leapt through a window (a hole in a wall). Gaps in plot, imagery and setting reflect the omission of important information from the play's source, the ballad "Child Waters",<sup>14</sup> in which a pregnant maiden must follow her nobleman lover barefoot, among other trials, in order to become his bride. Kleist expunges the pregnancy, and with it the motivation for events, so that only the dream remains as a kind of intertextual screen memory for the absent sexual encounter between Strahl and Käthchen. The information that Käthchen is really a princess comes to light in another hole in the earth, an ironic sign of the still-gaping hole in Strahl and Käthchen's story. Meanwhile, Strahl has become engaged to marry Kunigunde, a disgruntled baroness who seduces him in order to regain her ancestral lands. Unbeknownst to Strahl, Kunigunde is a prosthetic beauty: "a mosaic work" of costuming and make-up effects (2446). Kunigunde's prostheses echo *Käthchen's* plot-hole: not only do they signify general incompleteness, but they include false teeth—a stopgap in the oral cavity and thus a marker of deficiency in the organ of communication. Not even the final marriage of Strahl to Käthchen can satisfactorily close the plot. Strahl tricks Käthchen into attending his supposed wedding to Kunigunde and as the wedding procession assembles, he publicly snubs Kunigunde and declares Käthchen his bride. In response, Käthchen "sinks" (4.14.sd), almost as if a hole has opened up beneath her, and Kunigunde stutters a curse (2681-2).<sup>15</sup> With Kunigunde's assurance that no one has seen the last of her, her mouthpiece once again bespeaks the imperfection of the play, which has failed to voice the desire at the root of its plot and failed to find closure. *Käthchen* performs its own undoing: as generic closure becomes inadequate to the thematic problems raised, the organic whole of the drama gives way to an organization of holes.

Whereas the circle fractures in *Käthchen*, it swells fit to burst in *The Sons of the Valley*. The "kaleidoscopic" play shifts focus at every turn among an abundance of imbricated literary forms,<sup>16</sup> including musical

interludes, documentation of Templar practices, bourgeois tragedy, neo-classical drama, popular and sentimental melodrama, and opera. Contradictory tendencies inform the play: Masonic mythmaking, supernaturalism, baroque excess and mystical prognostication on the one hand meet historical documentation and a classical aesthetic on the other. A simple description of the play's historical plotline fails to characterize its bizarre multiplicity, and is only included here to show how it breaks down. The play narrates the demise of the Knights Templar in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the fate of their last Grand Master, Jakob de Molay. In part 1, "The Templars on Cyprus," Molay resides at the Templar headquarters on Cyprus. Pope Clemens V summons Molay to Paris, ostensibly to discuss a consolidation of the crusading orders and mount a new crusade, and the finale shows Molay ready to depart for Paris. At the beginning of part 2, "The Brothers of the Cross," eight years have elapsed during which Molay has alienated the pope and the King of France and confessed under torture to Templar heresies. The play picks up with Molay a prisoner in Paris, where the Templars are put on trial. Molay retracts his confession and is sentenced to burn at the stake. But at this point, the historical plot gives way to myth; after a lightning bolt sets the pyre ablaze, Molay evades would-be rescuers and leaps ecstatically into the flames, following which the remaining Templars found Freemasonry and Molay's name lights up on high. Diverse fictional events motivate and result from the historical/mythical complex: loved ones are reunited, a nun is liberated, a Templar is seduced, murders are plotted, and a mystical conspiracy carried out. Accordingly, historical characters mingle with bourgeois family figures, allegorical vices, quasi-paranormal mystics and ghostly apparitions. At the same time as the historical blends into the mythological, a classical impulse strains against the chaotic multiplicity of the play. Schiller heavily influenced Werner's dramatic theories,<sup>17</sup> indeed, the play was first published with the subtitle "a dramatic poem" after Schiller's *Wallenstein*.<sup>18</sup> Further, Gerard Kozierek has shown that part 1 at least manages to uphold the three classical unities by bending the rules.<sup>19</sup> The unity of time is upheld thanks to a 24-hour time lapse between acts 2 and 3 that allows the play to depict only one day's worth of action in spite of the 2-day time-span. Unity of place is preserved throughout most of the play, except for extensions just beyond the Templar compound,<sup>20</sup> and unity of plot survives to the extent that the multiple plot lines can't really be separated. Opposing tendencies exist interlayered in Werner's play, where they might bulge, but never break or dissolve.

As Kleist and Werner's plays truncate and decapitate the body, they round-off structurally into redundant loops: each returns to a setting

equivalent to that of its beginning shortly before it concludes. *Käthchen* begins in a cave, and returns to a cave briefly in act 5 (10-12), before it shifts to a courtyard for the finale (5.13). In *Sons*, part 1 takes place entirely on an island, and revisits an island for one scene (6.9) before the final set change (6.10). Table 1-1 illustrates the parallel:

**Table 1-1**

Initial and final settings compared for *Käthchen of Heilbronn* and *The Sons of the Valley*.

<i>Käthchen of Heilbronn</i>		<i>Sons of the Valley</i>	
Act 1:	Cave*	Part 1:	Island*
Act 5, Scene 1:	Esplanade	Act 6, Scenes 1-8:	Prison
2-3:	Room		
4-9:	Room		
10-12:	Cave*	9:	Island*
13-14:	Castle Square	10-12:	Forest

While the plays are by no means the same size, a similar shaping principle is clearly at work. Each play completes a circle before it is itself complete, so that the circle appears as a premature gesture of closure. Yet, each play points in its finale towards another future return to the origin: the final lines of *Sons* call for departure to the British Isles (277), and in *Käthchen*, the heroine “sinks” and Strahl calls Kunigunde a “Giftmischerin,”—a poison mixer, in an echo of the accusations leveled against him in the cave of act 1. Consequently, the chart could be amended as follows (Table 1-2):

**Table 1-2**

Initial and final settings compared for *Käthchen of Heilbronn* and *The Sons of the Valley*, including anticipated settings.

<i>Käthchen of Heilbronn</i>		<i>Sons of the Valley</i>	
Act 1:	Cave*	Part 1:	Island*
Act 5, Scene 1:	Esplanade	Act 6, Scenes 1-8:	Prison
2-3:	Room		
4-9:	Room		
10-12:	Cave*	9:	Island*
13-14:	Castle Square	10-12:	Forest
<i>Future:</i>	<i>Cave*</i>	<i>Future:</i>	<i>Island*</i>

The plays appear to be turning circles without finding closure. What’s more, the settings themselves are rounded spaces. A cave is defined by broken circles, both when it is viewed frontally as an arched portal in the

earth, or from above, as an enclosed space with an opening in the periphery. Similarly in *Sons*, closed and isolated geographical spaces comprise microcosms of the globe. In these quasi-circular settings the structures and imagery of the plays connect, so that islands and caves become concentrated sites of reflection on circular form and ideology and compel a deeper investigation.

The prosthetic beauty Kunigunde reveals a good deal about the nature and function of dismemberment in *Käthchen*. Even for those who don't yet know of her prostheses, her physique emerges as a misshapen conglomerate of images from medieval romance and classical antiquity. She gains romantic and classical attributes at once when Strahl's vassal Flammberg calls her a spark of "Greek Fire" (753). On the one hand, "Greek Fire" is an explosive used in the middle ages,<sup>21</sup> and thus befits the historical context of the play. On the other hand, Flammberg refers here to Kunigunde's ignition of land conflicts and thus identifies her with that mythical beauty famous for sparking war: Helen of Troy. What follows develops both the classical and romantic associations of the knight's remark. Strahl's dramatic rescue of Kunigunde from her vengeful betrothed in act 2 echoes the damsel-in-distress episodes of knightly romance. At the same time, the Helen parallel strengthens with the siege of castle Thurneck in act 3, an attempt by Kunigunde's first betrothed to recapture his abducted bride. Kunigunde's romantic aspects appear tied to her outer appearance. Her status as a romantic heroine comes chiefly from her costume and her improvised construction of events. When she emerges with unbound hair from the charcoaler's hut in act 2 and throws herself on Strahl's mercy, she casts herself as a ravished romantic heroine. In the following carefully orchestrated scene with Strahl, she wears a "romantic outfit" and melodramatically expresses her gratitude. Even Kunigunde's concealed, prosthetic garments belong to the knightly genre: her iron shirt reflects Strahl's armor.<sup>22</sup> When Strahl finally catches Kunigunde in a state of undress, he discovers a crooked figure "like the Tower of Pisa" (2468). Even stripped of her romantic ornaments, she continues to sag under the weight of a Romanesque facade.

Because Kunigunde embodies theatricality in the play, the revelation of her bent form constitutes a meta-reflective moment. A villainess and arch dissembler, Kunigunde is above all an actress. Modulations in her rhetoric and body language clearly differentiate role-playing from unaffected behavior. In the Charcoaler's hut scene, she delivers rhapsodic speeches and adopts melodramatic poses clearly aimed at representing a specific interpretation of events and of her character (II/8). The same affectations mark her speech and gestures in the presence of Strahl and his

mother, to the extent that here Kunigunde controls the tone and rhythm of the scene, slowly working herself up emotionally to the climactic gesture of tearing up important documents (2.12). In scenes with her confidant, however, she interacts, rather than performs: she asks questions and exchanges information, rather than describing and declaring emotions or characterizing the situation. Kunigunde is not only an actress: she also directs and stage manages. In 2.8, when she discovers that her enemy Strahl is her rescuer, she nudges him into the role of captor, subtly hinting that he should take her to his castle (1121). In 2.10, she sets the scene for her seduction of Strahl and his mother: she sees to it that her props—the aforementioned important documents—are at hand, and she has even rehearsed all morning by luring birds to her window. As the personification of theatrical illusion, Kunigunde calls attention to the artificial construction behind it, to the prostheses of theater, so to speak. Herself a prosthetic beauty, she literally embodies the costume and make-up effects that create the illusion of a character on stage. Indeed, she is constantly associated with her dressing table and mirror.<sup>23</sup> Kunigunde's bowed spine evokes the arc of Aristotelian dramaturgy, a classical essence that echoes her Hellenic aspects. It also reflects the proscenium arch, which became the most common shape of theatrical space in the eighteenth century. Further, it reiterates the arches that permeate the setting of the play.<sup>24</sup> Strahl associates her with the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a structure of arches on arches too weighty for its foundation. Kunigunde's bent body thus presents a concentrated image for how the play views drama: as a distorted structure bowed by its excesses.

Significantly, it is the absence of Kunigunde's shirt that evokes a leaning tower. In fact, she seems only to require prosthetic enhancements for her upper body—her torso and head, so that her limbs effectively disappear. Early comparisons of Kunigunde to marble effigies focus on the body's core. In 2.3, Strahl directs his wrath at her face and white throat and lends her the physical scope of a marble bust (788-794, 804-807). Two scenes later, Kunigunde's former suitor Freiburg seems to grant her the full physique of a classical statue, albeit a hollow one: he likens her "unsubstantial image" to "an Olympic goddess resplendent on the pedestal" (919-920).<sup>25</sup> But references to the upper body surround this statuesque figure. Immediately before, Freiburg mentions his own "breast, shriveled to wood" (918).<sup>26</sup> The petrification of his own body echoes the stoniness he then ascribes to Kunigunde. No sooner has he erected this figure than he deposes it: turning "the uppermost to undermost, so that with eyes will be beheld, that no god lives in it" (921-2).<sup>27</sup> The upper body composes the essential part of the classical figure, the part that renders its

emptiness visible. In this image of the deposed statue, its reduction to a torso, the play also recasts the eighteenth century reception of classical antiquity. Primarily influenced by Winckelmann, the neo-classical tradition in Germany emphasizes the symmetry and closure of ancient art. For instance, in his “Description of a torso in the Belvedere in Rome”, he urges the viewer to look at the headless, limbless chunk of stone with a “calm eye” that recovers the missing body parts.<sup>28</sup> His implicit acknowledgement of a lack that must be filled becomes in Lessing an outright denial of formal imperfection. In his discussion of the Laocoon Group sculpture, Lessing is at pains to close the holes in the classical body when he strives to characterize Laocoon’s expression as a sigh rather than a scream.<sup>29</sup> The popularity of the Pygmalion myth at this time also testifies to an insistence on the life-like perfection of classical form. *Käthchen* reacts against the neo-classical assertion of wholeness and symmetry that informs Weimarian drama. Instead it presents ancient art as it appears: fragmented, in limbless torsos. Kleist’s play goes further than simply undoing the reconstructive gaze, however. In the character of Kunigunde, the play reflects on attempts to complete fragmented figures via dramatic unity. Through the image of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which was never really straight, it insists on disfigurement as an essential characteristic of Romantic drama.

Torso imagery propagates throughout the play via the ubiquitous shirt motif. Manfred Weinberg identifies Kunigunde’s posture enhancing “iron shirt” with the “light white linen cloth” Strahl wears in his pastoral fantasy and the “light chemise” Käthchen wears in the New Year’s Eve dream when they first meet.<sup>30</sup> In his efforts to identify these shirt-like garments, Weinberg overlooks the armor Strahl wears in the events that precipitate the play. In the first scene, Käthchen’s father Theobald narrates how Strahl entered his smithy one day for repairs. It isn’t obvious that Strahl’s damaged “Schienen”—splints—cover his torso: Grimm lists “Schienen” as armor for arms and legs and even cites its use as such in *Käthchen*’s duel scene (2311-2). Yet the damage is seen through the eyes of Theobald, who says Strahl’s breast and heart caused the armor to burst (147, 176). Theobald also sets his stool in front of (“vor”) Strahl to make the repairs (151), as if to focus on Strahl’s breast and thus on a damaged breastplate or shirt of armor. Furthermore, Strahl expressly wishes not to undress in this scene (145-6), and Weinberg has shown that the shirt imagery comes hand in hand with the problem of nakedness.<sup>31</sup> Strahl thus possesses an “iron shirt” akin to Kunigunde’s, and together these battle garments emerge as an inversion of the idyllic undershirts worn elsewhere by Strahl and Käthchen. Strahl’s identification with both kinds of garments cannot

be read as simply symbolic of the bad (violent) and good (peaceful) love choices he can make, not only because Strahl himself is associated with both the masculine iron shirt and the feminine undershirt, but also because Kätchen and Kunigunde can't be consistently associated with these poles.<sup>32</sup> Distinguishing the armored shirts from the light shirts, instead of equating them as Weinberg does, thus adds another dimension to his conclusion that dichotomies like "armor und nakedness, masculinity und femininity, art and nature" can not be maintained in the play (597). As the boundary between the bare and the clothed chest evaporates, the shirt becomes a metonym for the torso it covers. The obsession with torsos pinpoints the play's central hole, namely: the pregnancy that sets its plot, and Kätchen, in motion. In its stead, the misshapeness of the absent pregnancy projects onto all of the appearing bodies in the play.

To include Kätchen in the play's reflections on dismemberment is to oppose an entire tradition that considers her the whole to Kunigunde's parts.<sup>33</sup> Gerhard Kluge posits her deformation, but only as a result of Strahl's treatment of her in the play.<sup>34</sup> But disfigurement marks Kätchen from the very beginning. It is already present in Theobald's narration of her first encounter with Strahl. Literally swept off her feet by the Count, Kätchen snaps above the knees when she leaps out her window after him. Her father narrates: "And breaks both her thighbones, [...], both tender thighbones, close above the kneecap's ivory edifice" (185-7). In poetic language and a mournful tone, Theobald eulogizes Kätchen's lower half. He carefully pinpoints the break and emphasizes the disconnected lower body. Even after Kätchen recovers and returns to her feet, the disfiguring break persists when Theobald bemoans her garment: a "little skirt, that covers her hips" (216). Curiously, Theobald's paternal pique emphasizes what Kätchen's skirt covers, rather than what it reveals and calls attention again to the site of her break. Even in a river crossing scene that revolves around whether Kätchen will set *foot* in the water, cracks emerge that disconnect her from her feet. Strahl's servant Gottschalk paternally encourages her to enter the water "just up to the gusset" (502). The vague term gusset ("Zwickel") can be a seam or joint in multiple contexts. When Gottschalk subsequently refers to her ankle, another joint, and the angle ("Kante") of her foot, his language evokes the concerns of carpentry. Gottschalk's perception of Kätchen's anatomy highlights its joints and gaps, so that Kätchen begins to look like a puppet, an artificial assemblage of parts.<sup>35</sup> Although Kätchen roams far and wide on foot, she frequently appears without a leg to stand on. She often faints and falls, such as at her first sight of Strahl (163). Kätchen and Strahl's New Year's Eve vision brings the images of leglessness and the upper body



together when Käthchen falls at Strahl's feet in her "light chemise" (1223, 2126). At this moment she appears a toppled torso just like Kunigunde. Käthchen's collapse in the finale therefore emerges not as the consequence of her deformation over the play, as Kluge would have it, but as a sign of the hidden deformities that undermine her throughout.

If many leaps are required to connect Käthchen via seams and shirts to Kunigunde and deformity, the play provides more direct signs. Käthchen's birthmark, for instance, is a surprisingly obvious imperfection that scholars have largely left unconsidered. With this mark, noble birth mars Käthchen long before she dons the imperial bridal regalia in the end. When Käthchen wears the bridal garments, they cover her birthmark but at the same time metonymically represent it. Thus they function like the significant pieces of clothing discussed above: they are to the birthmark as stockings to disjointed legs, and shirts to disfigured torsos. As if this literal and physical mark isn't enough, fate also marks Käthchen metaphysically. In discussing Käthchen's fate, scholars usually focus on the New Year's Eve dream and tend to overlook the ritual of lead-pouring ("*Bleigießen*") that precipitates it. However, this moment contains the actual revelation of Käthchen's destined marriage to a "tall, handsome knight" (2092); the dream follows as an illustration. Not only the moment but the activity of lead-casting resonates with the themes and structures of the play. The process consists of melting lead over a flame and pouring it into water where it quickly re-solidifies. Lead-casting thus involves two inverse processes: liquidification and solidification, by fire and water. Käthchen undergoes identical elemental processes in the play: her trial by fire occurs in act 3 when she rescues a portrait from a burning castle, and her trial by water consists of discovering Kunigunde's secret while bathing. Having passed through fire and water, Käthchen ultimately "sinks" like the piece of lead in the final scene (2678 stage direction). Further, the state-changes of the lead align with Käthchen's status changes—from noble (her actual class) to bourgeois (a state falsely induced by circumstances) to noble (a return to her original state). Far from indicating a transformation or deformation of some original whole, Käthchen's disfigurement and sinking embody a distortion that marked her all along. The play's namesake, like the play itself, comes full circle by the end.

In *Käthchen*, the poetic imagination looks to dissect rather than perfect the world, to round-off rather than fill out the body. As the bodies of Käthchen and Kunigunde crumple, they come into alignment with the twisted loops that structure the drama and the reduction of the body to its core reflects the reduction of the drama to core conflicts that cannot be resolved. Ideal Vitruvian proportion is lost to the limbless torso, which can

no-longer reach out to a perfect circular periphery. But a new perspective on the center is gained: “the navel” from which the circle emanated in the first place becomes the object of the poetic imagination’s gaze. However, unlike typical Romantic introspection, *Käthchen’s* navel gazing does not simply represent an inwardly oriented variant of the imagination’s completing gaze. Rather, *Käthchen’s* hole-ridden plot draws the gaze onto the body and the drama as epistemologically fragmented.

Werner’s *Sons of the Valley* fixates on the head, rather than the torso, as the center of the body. Compounds on the word head frequently define people by their craniums: an old man is a “wobbly-head” (24) or “grey-head” (97), an impulsive youth is a “hot-head” (20), and bad-tempered people are “grouchy-heads” (62, 122). Evil and negative emotions also manifest themselves in the head: an enraged person looks as if their head will tear itself off (148); guilt feels like hot coals applied to the head (123). These heads invert eighteenth century sentimental convention by taking over for the heart as the emotional center of the body. The same mixture of head and heart governs the “Haupt” of the Templar order, Molay, who is also called a: “great, [...] misunderstood heart” (15). Though supposedly “composed and wise like a Master”, Molay is ultimately ruled by his emotions: his heart tends to “effervesce” and run away with him (14). The heart’s tendency to bubble up into the head leads to no good in the play. Misfortune befalls Adalbert, a young initiate, just as his head is filled with delight at his impending marriage (14). Ambushed, he receives a blow to his head that puts him in a coma and causes his beloved to join a nunnery. Adalbert’s head-wound punishes over-flowing emotion at its source. The heart dominated head emerges as the central weakness of the Templar Order with the giant devil’s head that they worship. The grisly head represents the fallen master Baffometus, who became blinded by his lust for gold. In punishment, God causes horns to grow on his head, dismembers him, gilds his heart and implants it in his forehead (165-66). The heart-bearing devil’s head and the Tale of the Fallen Master form an emblem of the Templar Order, which has succumbed to the temptation of gold. Werner’s transferal of the body’s corruptive, problematic desires to the head indicates a psychological source for the moral and ethical problems of the play.

Imagery of beheading enters the play as a means of removing physical and moral excess. In act 1, a conversation among stonemasons allegorically rejects the head as an essential part. When an apprentice wonders that his master should spend so much time polishing a simple capstone, the master chastises him: “every capital is a dome” (7). The dome, a building’s crowning feature, is a product of the stones that support

it and no more. This image for society as an edifice of well-fitting stones can be found in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, as well as in Freemasonry, and implies the expendability of elements that protrude from the harmonious whole. Indeed the play concerns itself with the removal of the Templar head, Molay. Historically, the Grand Master Molay dies by fire, and the play outwardly conforms to this detail. Yet its imagery works against historical fact to portray Molay's death as a beheading. In an early scene, the Gardener Philipp prefigures the shift to martyrdom by beheading when he associates Saint Sebastian's death by arrow wounds with an attack to the head: "Because he would not deny the faith/ the tyrant had him pierced with arrows.—/ This skull too was bleached by tyranny. (*He points to his head.*)" (159). Martyrdom and beheading also converge in a veritable prophecy of decapitation that marks the Grandmaster's head. In act 6 he tells acolytes of the six head-wounds he has suffered in battle; he even bares his head and invites them to count the scars (140). The number of scars means more than a deterrent for naïve initiates. The play invokes the number seven throughout to indicate ripeness, harmony, and completion, in keeping with seven's biblical significance. Molay's six scars suggest an unfinished sequence: they imply that a seventh head-wound, a final i.e. fatal one, lies in store. As such, Molay's prefigured beheading paradoxically implies a restoration of order. The ironic gesture of completion by subtraction suggests that the play critiques, rather than upholds, the removal of problematic excesses.

Another kind of head-loss further complicates Molay's martyrdom, namely: a mental trauma. At the beginning of part 2, Molay has gone mad after his imprisonment and torture by the King's men. Molay's recovery during the play explores man's psychological ability to cope with impending death. In the end, a relapse into madness seems to accompany Molay's martyrdom: when friends attempt to prevent his execution, he appears "exalted, in the highest rapture, lifting face and hands towards Heaven" (267 s.d.). In this euphoric attitude he throws himself into the fire, so that at the same time as he literally burns to death, Molay figuratively loses his head. The play's push to decapitate Molay in spite of history could stem from the tradition of martyr narrative, which privileges beheading as the noblest death. In hagiography, decapitation narratologically marks closure,<sup>36</sup> but this martyrdom scene does not end the play. Further, Molay's enthusiasm for death transgresses the code of saintly behavior by which martyrs die passively and are typically depicted wearing expressions of composure. The crowd in *Sons* registers Molay's act with "horror", as an unexpected violation of decorum. In fact, their reaction mirrors the horror of an initiate who sees the devil's head in part 1

(164 s.d.). Further, Molay's impassioned facial expression evokes the head's "rolling, flaming eyes" (163). Essentially, the devil's head appears here on the saint's shoulders. Far from providing a cure, the isolation and decapitation of the head has created a moment of ambivalence, where ecstasy and madness coincide. The ambivalence of the climax suggests that as desire shifts to the head in the play it also retreats from clear moral polarity.

The appearance of the devil's head undermines Molay even before his martyrdom. Molay's saintly head at the top of the Templar Order and representative of its erstwhile virtues, finds a counterpart in the sinister skull at its base. The Templar Order effectively has two heads: one which the play attempts to condemn, while it strives to sanctify the other. Walter Benjamin describes tyranny and martyrdom as the "Janus-heads of the crowned" that find expression in two different kinds of baroque drama.<sup>37</sup> Werner radicalizes the baroque when he places these two heads on the same shoulders. As shown above, both heads are associated with hearts: the devil's head bears a gilded heart on its brow, and Molay's heart figuratively runs away with his head. Consequently, both fiendishness and virtue appear as the conflation of emotion and rationality. As the distance dissolves between saint and devil, between mind and heart, what appeared to be two symmetrical heads appear more like two faces on the same head. In effect, the play circumscribes one giant Janus-head that renders morality a matter of perspective, so that it becomes impossible to tell whether the play condemns a demon or glorifies a martyr. To bring the discussion back to the shape of the play, redundant circling emerges as a reflection of the play's central thematic ambiguities. As seen above, the play traces a looping movement from an island at the margins of Europe to one at its center and back out to another marginal isle. Both Cyprus and the Isle de la Cité represent places of ambiguity, where devils and saints coincide, and the New Order's founding as a reanimation of the old leaves no reason to expect clarity will be found in the British Isles. These islands function like the images that they hold, that is, like Janus-heads: they mark malfunctioning gateways that open only onto the same. *The Sons of the Valley* presents an ethical critique of the Romantic dialectic when it highlights that the cost of progression essentially cancels progress out.

Kleist and Werner's dismemberment of dialectics operates as a proto-postmodern critique of violent progress via opposition and negation. Their reflection on the Romantic spiral shows that throwing a curve into linear models does not evade the ethical problems of dialectics. An alternative is present in the same "perverse" imagery through which these plays critique Romantic ideology. Kleist and Werner's imagery of physical

dismemberment belongs to a formal strategy of twisting and disjoining that undermines oppositions and halts teleological progress. This anti-hierarchical aesthetic can be seen as a prototype for 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical models like Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome," which describes a non-linear, multiplicitous mode of thought. For subjectivity, such structures mean the possibility of a self outside of binary struggles like that between master and slave, or the symbolic and the semiotic. Kleist and Werner's loops imply a subjectivity that impishly escapes assertion at the expense of or dictated by an other. The postmodernists call this kind of subjectivity perverse, extrapolating from psychoanalysis's assertion of the polymorphous perversity of infant desire. A reading of the perverse forms in these plays thus ultimately finds a way back to the Romantic project of a return to utopian origins, only an origin of multiplicity rather than of the One. Consequently, the two playwrights most neglected in narratives of Romanticism are actually its most progressive authors, if by progress we understand their deep-seated critique of teleology.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*. 72.
- <sup>2</sup> See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 344.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.
- <sup>4</sup> Nevelidine, *Bodies at Risk*, 5. See also Mücke, *The Seduction of the Occult*.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2. All quotations from Werner's play are cited from this edition. All translations are by the author.
- <sup>6</sup> "historisches Ritterschauspiel"—the play's subtitle - refers to dramaticizations of German medieval subjects that came into vogue with Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen" (1773).
- <sup>7</sup> *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1. All quotations from Kleist's works are cited from this edition. All translations are by the author.
- <sup>8</sup> Schlegel's term "irony" denotes the paradox that results from the juxtaposition of universality and limitation in aesthetic form. Irony expresses the poet's reflexive, ambivalent suspension between these poles. For a summary, see Kremer's recent handbook: *Romantik*, 92-95. For an account of various theorists' use of spiral figures to describe Schlegel's irony see Livingston, *Arrow of Chaos*, 89-90.
- <sup>9</sup> Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism*, 169.
- <sup>10</sup> For instance, Tieck's meta-theatrical comedy *Puss in Boots (Der Gestiefelte Kater)* from 1797 depicts the performance of a play that is constantly interrupted