Abjection and Adoption in Lessing, Kleist, and Kafka

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ABJECTION AND ADOPTION IN LESSING, KLEIST, AND KAFKA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the intertextuality among Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*, Kleist’s *Der Findling* and Kafka’s *Das Urteil*. Focus is laid on the repeated deployment of specific character types: an elderly, morally minded merchant and his adopted children. By tracing the similarities and differences of these literary works, themes of economics and adoption come to be understood as central motifs in these texts, and the different depictions of these motifs are shown to reflect differing notions of the self. The analyses in this thesis draw heavily upon the theory of the abject as portrayed in Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Whereas Kristeva understands abjection as functioning within the context of a “social economy,” this thesis tracks its treatment within other economic structures, starting with a moral economy in Lessing’s drama, moving to an emotional economy in Kleist’s novella, and ending with a semiotic economy in Kafka’s novella.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lessing, Kleist, and Kafka are all respectively representative of great changes in writing, thought and creative expression in German literature and culture. This work traces the ongoing deployment of certain literary figures across time as each of these writers leaves their impressions upon them. The figures in question are that of a successful, morally minded merchant and his adoptive children. In certain works of each of the authors that this study concerns itself with, these figures arise again and again, reflecting similar themes, but also demonstrating remarkable changes. The developments that happen to these types reflect deep-level changes in German thought and theory, but also elucidate the contributions of individual authors to these changes.

Two major concepts find voice again and again in the intertextual dialogue in which these shifting character types exist: adoption and economics. One of the interesting things an intertextual approach to these types reveals is that these concepts are in fact quite interrelated. The variations on these types and the different stories and outcomes they live out also demonstrate the various shades of interpretation these concepts are susceptible to. Correspondingly how concepts of adoption and economics play off of each other, depends a lot on what is understood under such terms.

My analysis of Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* begins the investigation of these types. Although earlier stories involving a merchant who adopts children probably exist and are important to a fuller appreciation of this motif in the history of German literature, I start with Lessing, because his drama inaugurates this theme into a literature under the influence of the *Aufklärung*. Read in light of Lessing’s *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, it is relatively clear
that *Nathan* is part of a didactic program to spread the *Aufklärung* and elevate humanity to a higher level of being and thinking. Although Kleist and Kafka’s novellas are obviously not part of a literature of the *Aufklärung*, both operate nonetheless in awareness of and to a degree in response to it.

Using Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, I analyze practices of abjection in Lessing’s drama to identify philosophical underpinnings of Lessing’s imperative for tolerance. In contrast to interpretations which see Lessing’s notion of tolerance to be superficial and outdated, my reading argues that *Nathan* reveals a philosophically complex understanding of adoption and identity. Underlying his concept of tolerance is what I call Lessing’s “moral economy.” This consists of several interrelated imperatives. First the drama argues against materially abjective idealism, and demands a focus on material concerns. This focus must then be raised up through reason and discourse to the level of the ideal, to give rise to an exchange of goodness on the basis of gratitude. It is this exchangeability that allows for a rethinking of the other, by which one “adopts” the other. Ostensibly this indicates an interaction with the abject, by which the other is – as is the case of adoption – understood simultaneously as other and belonging to the self.

In Kleist’s *Der Findling*, however, the idea of the moral economy is corrupted by the possibility of emotional contagion. This upsets the stabilizing function adoption plays in *Nathan* and relocates it in an “emotional economy” run rampant. Consequently the characters become alienated from themselves.

The change that happens between these first two texts underscores the dependence of Lessing’s logic on the assumption of a stable self and certain conditions for the relationship between *Innenwelt* and *Außenwelt*. By the same token, it demonstrates Kleist’s contributions to a
skepticism towards this view of the self. For Kleist the self becomes a semi-permeable vessel, whose identity is always in question.

In *Der Findling* this identity is only determined by a kind of strategic positioning within the emotional economy. In this way the family structure – rather than being supported and validated by a moral economy, as is the case in *Nathan* – suffers dissolution as the emotional economy lays claim to it. The novella’s conclusion highlights the instability of this new emotionally structured economics of the self, which is lost in an endless struggle for identity, represented by Piachi exacting revenge on Colino eternally in Hell.

Endlessness becomes important again in Kafka’s *Das Urteil*, as part of a “semiotic economy.” In this novella Kleist’s use of adoption as a challenge to identity is taken to such an extreme, that the case of adoption remains uncertain. In this analysis I argue that by withholding the true relation of the friend to the father, Kafka makes the text indeterminate. It is beyond the reader’s ability to explain how and why the events of the text unfold the way that they do. And yet the reader must do this. In the ceaseless interpretive exchange that takes place between reader and text, the semiotic economy emerges. The story that forms around the gaps, which the reader is called upon but unable to fill, performs the creation of this kind of endless exchange between reader and text.

This arch from Lessing’s moral economy, to Kleist’s emotional economy, and finally ending with Kafka’s semiotic economy sketches shifts in literature’s place in social functions and the history of thought and aesthetics. Lessing uses a wise old merchant to educate the masses. Kleist inverts this character, and the ironic narration deconstructs the enlightenment framework its predecessor built upon. Kafka continues Kleist’s deconstructive process, but like Lessing seeks the audience’s involvement. This happens, however, in a reverse fashion, since
instead of the audience applying the text to their lives, as Lessing would have it, *Das Urteil* sucks the reader into the world of the text.
CHAPTER 2

DIRTY MONEY

Fiscal abjection and economic imperatives in Lessing’s Nathan der Weise

The role of the abject in Lessing’s drama Nathan der Weise lends itself already to even the most superficial interpretation. A typical reading of the play would conclude that the characters overcome intolerance, which divides their religions, in order to figuratively and literally form a new humanistic family. By trading out the word “intolerance” for “abjection” the summary remains mostly the same, except for that the notion of religion becomes a bit more complex. Whereas “intolerance” may be written off as some regrettable, accidental excess that the monotheistic religions have, for whatever reason, taken on, abjection underscores an intrinsic, indeed grounding, component to religious identity. As will be shown, attention to abjection in the reading of Nathan der Weise reveals the surprising emphasis Lessing’s text lays on economic affairs and the primacy of a socially just economic awareness to any authentic religion. This economic-mindedness turns out to be the antidote to intolerance offered by the text, and its abjection from religious thought is contrasted as the source, not only of religious intolerance, but also of the inefficiency and inauthenticity of many believers.

Toleranz

As Julia Kristeva points out in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, abjection takes place at the origin of identity development. The self cannot be a self without first rejecting the abject, or the part of the self that is also an other. This applies not only to psychoanalytical studies of the self, but also to religion and religious identity. Monotheistic religions must deploy strategies of abjection, in order to validate their claims on the absolute truth of the one true God in rejection of all other beliefs. In the case of the Abrahamic religions, the abject becomes the
very commonalities these religions share with each other (since they compromise the absolute
indivisibleness of faith), which in the play are celebrated and allow for the establishment of new
identities within a universal human family. In the play this supposedly takes place without
dissolving the contrasting religious identities. In his article “‘Dies hohe Lied der Dudlund’? The
Ambiguities of Toleration in Lessing’s ‘Die Juden and Nathan der Weise’” Ritchie Robertson
contextualizes the enlightenment based visions suggested in the text with actual social and
political developments surrounding the period of the play’s publication. According to Robertson,
these developments would appear on the surface to have liberated Jews from cultural oppression,
but, as Robertson goes on to show, they also undermine Jewish cultural identity, so that “the
universalism denoted by the word ‘Mensch’ was in ultimately tragic conflict with the pressure
[on Jews] to adopt a particular culture” (Robertson, 108). In Lessing’s play, the same could also
be argued for all religions depicted, which in the final scene, do seem to dissolve into one
general identity

For Robertson the conclusion of the play is thus a celebration of “a pseudo-tolerance that
tolerates different beliefs only on the assumption that they are not really different; masquerading
as toleration of others, it makes the implicit claim that its own values are universal and
unchallengeable” (109). The only way to move beyond this claim would be, as I have already
stated, to move from as a study of tolerance, which overcomes difference, to an analysis of
abjection, which creates difference within the same and thus serves as a prerequisite for both
prejudice and for tolerance.

1 For more on the theme of tolerance in Nathan, see the Spann-Lenz debate, which spanned across the following
essays and articles:
Meno Spann, “Der ‘Nathan’ im heutigen Literaturunterricht,” German Quaterly, XII, No. 3 (May, 1939); Harold
Lenz, “Der Deutschlehrer und Lessings ‘Nathan’,” idem, XIV, No. 2 (March, 1941); Harold Lenz, “Der
Deutschlehrer und Lessings ‘Nathan’ (Schluß),” idem, XIV, No. 3 (May, 1941); Meno Spann, “Wie? Auf Nathan
Argwöhn?” idem, XIV, No. 4 (November, 1942); Harold Lenz, “So lad ich über tausend Jahre,” idem, XIV, No. 4
(November/XIV).
– Citation list taken from Fred L. Fehling’s “Epilogue to ‘Nathan.’
One might argue that Lessing’s play does not explore or finds a way around the paradoxical nature of abjection. But in fact this very issue arises in the character Daja, whose good intentioned betrayal of Nathan highlights the inherent tension within a collective, in which opposing beliefs are accepted, and yet personal beliefs remain crucial to identity formation. As she struggles to come to terms with this betrayal, Recha says of Daja:

Ach! Die arme Frau…
sich gedrungen fühlen, einen jeden,
Der dieses [christlichen] Wegs verfehlt, darauf zu lenken. –
Kaum könne sie auch anders. Denn ist’s wahr,
Daß dieser Weg allein nur richtig führt:
Wie sollen sie gelassen ihre Freude
Auf einem andern wandeln sehn, - der ins
Verderben stürzt, ins ewige Verderben?
Es müßte möglich sein, denselben Menschen
Zur selben Zeit zu lieben und zu hassen (131).

This complex constellation of acceptance and rejection touches on Kristeva’s meditations on the Abject. Recha’s simultaneous love and hate of her longtime female caretaker and closest motherly figure reflects the ambivalent relation of subject to abject, particularly as it occurs in the development of the ego via the rejection of the mother.

It follows then, that abjection is not something left out of this narrative of the development of a deist, humanistic universal family of man, but is in fact an important, complicating element of discourse that Lessing’s drama actively engages with. In fact I argue that abjection is more central to the moral imperatives propounded by the text, than tolerance. Aside from the patriarch, all of the main characters in the text are more or less tolerant and accepting of each other. Even Daja cannot be so intolerant, as she has clearly come to respect Nathan very highly. What separates the characters is, as I assert, hardly mutual hatred or intolerance, but personal failings, which stem from their religiously based self-identity. And these personal failings are best understood as identity-formative acts of abjection. In order to
understand more precisely how abjection influences the narrative, I shall examine several often-overlooked details, in which ejecta plays a critical role.

**Verschwwendung**

One theme in the play, which as far as I have been able to research has garnered surprisingly little critical attention is Saladin’s practically chronic wastefulness. On the surface this can be understood as a plot device: the Sultan’s need for money demands of him that he seek financial support from Nathan, bringing the two characters together and further carrying the plot to its necessary outcome. And yet considerable length is dedicated to this topic, not just to Saladin’s financial troubles but also to his characteristic economic naivety, which occupies the internal plot of several scenes even well after it has fully served its functional purpose of bringing Nathan and Saladin into contact with one another.

One interpretation might suggest that Saladin’s behavior reflects his generosity, thus implying an underlying goodwill towards mankind, a morality superseding his religious beliefs. He is after all so bent on curing his land of poverty, “Dass er mit Stumpf und Stiel sie [die Bettler] zu vertilgen/ Sich vorgesetzt, - und sollt’ er selbst darüber/ Zum Bettler werden” (Lessing, 18). It is in fact Nathan, who in giving generously to him, allows Saladin to continue his generosity towards the poor – a value extolled and embodied by Christ, but also Mohammed and the Jewish law. Thus one might read in this a unifying motif reflecting ideals, which span religions and are shared by characters, thus bolstering the humanistic argument for tolerance.

And yet his actions in this regard receive very little praise and positive critique. Even Al-Hafi, the Dervish, who had devoted himself to an ascetic life, is appalled by Saladin’s senseless giving (Lessing 18). The specific instances of Saladin’s giving would imply little in the way of compassion for the poor and more a lack of concern for his own wealth. In the first scene of the
second act, Sittah teases her brother, whom she is about to beat at a game of chess. She says to him, “[G]ewann ich immer nicht am meisten/ Mit dir, wenn ich verlor? Wenn hast du mir/ Den Satzt, mich des vorlornen Spieles wegen/ Zu trösten, doppelt nicht hernach geschenkt?” (Lessing, 33). Sittah, sister of the sultan, can hardly be considered a beggar in need of money. In fact her scheming is only out of compassion for her brother, so that she return the money she weasels out of him to Al-Haffi, who can then continue to manage it, in order to keep Saladin from donating himself into bankruptcy (Lessing, 38). That Saladin does not even notice the urgency of his financial situation, points more towards carelessness than generosity. After all, only carelessness can explain his not noticing any sooner the conspiracy keeping his finances afloat.

In other moments his apparent generosity actually seems to do more harm than good, as in the case of the Mameluck, who in the opening scene of the final act breaks his neck in a race to first declare the arrival of tribute from Egypt to the Sultan, in hopes of a generous reward for the news (Lessing, 116). Furthermore, his giving requires frequent trips to the fortress, where his treasures are stored. Even in this his mannerisms betray carelessness, in that he often travels alone, making him a vulnerable target in a time of war. Indeed the patriarch hopes to exploit this habit to assassinate Saladin by instrumentalizing the Tempelherr (Lessing, 27). It is clear then, that Saladin approaches his money with a kind of carelessness and wastefulness that, though not indulgent or materialistic, puts himself and others in danger.

If generosity cannot fully explain his giving, what then? I argue that the giving serves as a purge, a ritualistic, impulsive cleansing of the self from the abject. To clarify this point in its relation to the text, it is important to look at how Saladin defines himself, as self, and against what he must define himself, i.e. what need be abjected from the self.
When Al-Hafin and Sittah confront him with his wasteful donations, Saladin defends himself. He espouses to be spiritually above such trivial material matters by retorting: “Ich arm? Der Bruder arm?/ Wenn hab ich mehr? wenn weniger gehabt? -/ Ein Kleid, Ein Schwert, Ein Pferd, - und Einen Gott/ Was brauch ich mehr? Wenn kann’s an dem mir fehlen?” (Lessing, 39). Note here the peculiar capitalization of the indirect pronouns. This emphasizes the singularity of these objects; he does not need a horse, but only one single horse. This in turn underscores the singularity and independence of his Dasein – an ego unimpeded by entanglement with material needs and desires.

Thus on the one hand this statement affirms a positive, ego-constructing, creative act. On the flipside however it still mandates a rejection, a ruling out of all that does not belong to the self. This would explain his eagerness to detach himself from the monetary excess clinging to and weighing down his identity.

At the same time, however, it would be naïve to assume that money in this instance did not represent any more than mere coinage. According to George Simmel in his Philosophie des Geldes money functions as the “vielleicht konzentriertesten und zugespitztesten Form und Äußerung des Vertrauens in die gesellschaftlich-staatliche Ordnung” (165). Thus despising money means a rejection of the very fabric that binds one to society and all the responsibilities one has within that society and its economic system. And this forms the crux of my argument in this chapter, which I will return to in a round-about way, but first it is important to address the specifics that the text betrays about what, and whom, the money means for Saladin.

Unser Vater…

Sittah’s interest in keeping Saladin from falling too deep into the red exemplifies not only sibling compassion, but also her concern as daughter to her father, when she exclaims, “Wenn
ich unserm Vater/ Auch seine Sorgen so erleichtern könnte!” (Lessing, 39). This statement
follows directly on the heels of Saladin’s aforementioned outspoken abjection of material
concerns. Saladin responds to Sittah’s concern for their father: “Ah! Ah! Nun schlägst du meine
Freudigkeit/ Auf einmal wieder nieder! – Mir, für mich/ Fehlt nichts, und kann nichts fehlen.
Aber ihm [dem Vater]/ Ihm fehlet; und in ihm uns allen” (Lessing, 39). It appears that Saladin
seeks or at least wishes to border himself off from his father. His statement sets up a structural
differentiation between self and father: “Mir, für mich fehlt nichts” and furthermore “kann nichts
fehlen” vs. “ihm, ihm fehlet”. Both personal pronouns (“mir/mich”, “ihm”) are doubled in the
statement, emphasizing the distinction between first-person self and third-person other. The
grammar further contrasts the two beings, in that the sentence about Saladin and that about his
father are separated by a period and the distinguishing conjunction “aber”. And yet Saladin must
pay tribute to the connection binding them, namely that “in ihm uns allen [fehlt]”. The
preposition “in” seems a surprising choice. One would more likely suppose “mit” to be used. But
this “in ihm” seems to connote the being-in-the-mother, which according to Kristava, forms the
initial dilemma that the developing ego overcomes by means of abjection, by turning the mother
into a “not-I” abject2. It also calls to mind such religious turns of phrase where “in God” is used.
And it is the recognition of exactly this “In-dem-Vater-Fehlen,” which “suddenly knocks down
Saladin’s joy”.

Turning to another scene, in Act one, scene five, the monk describes to the Tempelherr
the fortress, “[i]n der die ungeheurn Summen stecken,/ Mit welchen Saladins vorsicht’ger Vater/
Das Heer besoldet, und die Zurüstungen/ Des Krieges bestreitet” (Lessing, 27). This is also the
same block of speech, in which the monk mentions Saladin’s occasional trips to this location
“kaum begleitet”, an obviously potentially fatal oversight on Saladin’s part, in that he thereby

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2 See chapter I of Kristeva’s Powers of Horror
exposes himself to potential assassination attempts (Lessing, 27). Thus the text delivers in the
same moment the description of Saladin’s father as “vorsichtig” and a man, who in his
carefulness has amassed “ungeheuer[e] Summen” and spends it wisely on the necessary
expenditures for the security of his state, and Saladin as the careless, thoughtless man, whose
later handlings with money only further exemplify his thoughtlessness. Ergo Saladin’s wasteful
giving and indifference towards even the most dire of economic matters should be read as a way
of rejecting his father, and by means of this abjection defining himself as a more or less ascetic
man of faith, who wants not but for God, since his father in turn comes to stand for fiscal
responsibility.

This insight combined with Leventhal’s assertion that in Act III.4 a “play on [religious]
identity and difference… articulates the problems in terms of the proximity of money and truth:
what is the true currency?” offers a new way of reading the inter-diegetic relationship between
the primary plot and the Ringparabel (507). If not only family, but also economics are to be
understood as central metaphors for religion, and if Saladin’s father, as I claim, is representative
of both categories, then it becomes of primary importance to ascertain his relation to the ring
parable.

The cursory interpretation of the mise en abyme between play and parable draws a
connection between the three brothers and the three religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity –
as well as their representatives in the play: Saladin, the Muslim; Recha, the Jew; and the
Temeplherr; a Christian. Next to them, Nathan and in an extended sense enlightenment
philosophy itself is understood to be the judge, who advises the brother to live out the promise of
the rings power, rather than to fight over its authenticity. The coming judge, who will in some
distant future declare the truth, is God on the Day of Judgment. The father of the sons is also God or perhaps Abraham. Indeed this is the explanation given on Wikipedia.

One of my problems with this reading is that the role of the father is crucial to the parable and its real-world application, but is neglected in the plot of the play. He is described and his presence is felt in the parable, but is only a theoretical proposition in the play. (This differs from the final judge, who is also only speculated on in the parable.) The next point to bring up is then to assert, that just as the three brothers and the judge have diegetic counterparts in characters and real-world counterparts in religions and philosophies, the father also has its real world counterpart in Abraham and diegetic counterpart in Saladin’s father.

Heinz Politzer noticed, as he writes in “Lessings Parabel von den drei Ringen,” in the language of the Ringparabel, the father “‘besaß’ den Ring; es fällt aber auf, daß er im Osten ‘lebt.’” (166). Politzer chalks this miss-matching of tense up to abbreviation, leading to a perhaps unintentional mystification of the ring’s origin. In the real-world however this reflects a believer’s relationship to the patriarchs of his or her religion: they are no longer in possession of their words and teaching, but have passed them on to the believer, and yet they live on, both in paradise and through the inheritance of their teachings. The same can be said of Saladin’s father, who purportedly still lives, yet has clearly already handed over his wealth (perhaps to his regret) to his son. Like a patron saint, his presence is felt throughout the play in an economic sense, and yet he never comes to speak and is never seen in the context of the play. And finally, like Abraham and the father of the parable, he is the ancestor, who in fact binds his Muslim son, Saladin, Christian grandson, Curt, and Jewish granddaughter, Recha to each other as a family. Surprisingly the source of the new humanistic family at the play’s closing is not tolerance per se,
but, as has been noted, fiscal responsibility, since that is what Saladin’s father ultimately represents.

What to make of this? Returning to the topic of abjection, it was argued that Saladin’s rejection of his father was in fact an attempt to define himself as a man of God, abstracted from material concern, and that, which lead to his well-intentioned, but regrettable donations. Seen in this light, the notion of fiscal responsibility can be broadened to denote a willingness to attend to the material-economic reality of lived experience rather than escaping into the abstractions of mysticism and ideals. Thus Nathan der Weise would seem to ascribe money, the same social importance Simmel ascribes to it above. Saladin’s spending is endemic of a kind of religious abjection of the tangled, interdependent messiness of the material world. This abjection is in fact the first religious hurdle to be overcome in the logic of Lessing’s drama, prior to the intolerance, which springs from it.

This can be drawn from the Ringparabel itself, in that the brothers were so busy fighting over who could claim the notion of authenticity, they ignored the very facets — “vor Gott/ Und den Menschen angenehm zu machen” (Lessing, 71) — that bestowed the ring with actual authenticity and value. The initial problem then does not lie in the disagreement, but in forgetting where the real value of the ring came from, by focusing on the theoretical idea of an authentic ring. The judge’s suggestion is thus less a clever solution, and more a reminder to be primarily attentive to the things, actions and reactions present in the physical world.³

Verzicht

The same can be shown using Al-Hafi as an example. Al-Hafi offers the reader an example of someone, who though highly enlightened by reason, has lost touch with the real

³ For a consideration of value see Shell’s “‘What is Truth?’: Lessing’s Numismatics and Heidegger’s Alchemy.” Whereas Shell argues that Lessing dodges answering the question on the origin of truth and true value, I argue that Lessing, foreseeing Simmel, interprets both as deriving from social commitments.
world and cannot confront its complications. He joins Saladin’s court with good intentions, but then accuses himself of “Geckerei” for pride in the very good he tried to do (Lessing, 21).

Trapped in the paradox of his hopeless idealism, Al-Hafi resolves to return to the Ganges, “wo ich leicht und barfuß/ Den heißen Sand mit meinen Lehrern trete” (Lessing, 19). In recognition of his situation, Nathan advises him, “mache, daß du bald/ In deine Wüste wieder kommst. Ich fürchte,/ Grad unter Menschen möchtest du ein Mensch/ Zu sein verlernen” (21). Interestingly enough, Al-Hafi comes across as very intellectual, and open-minded. He is a brilliant chess player, and shares Nathan’s views on religion. And yet he is unfit for society, too idealistic to make the world a better place, and, like Saladin, chooses an ascetic purging of the material world, rather than to take up the responsibilities of living within the economically woven social fabric.

According to recent studies, Al-Hafi was initially intended to serve as a representative of Zoroastrianism⁴. He thus represents for Lessing, as with Nietzsche, the ultimate decent into thought. Unlike Nietzsche however, Lessing’s work, despite obvious sympathies for him, demonstrated by Nathan’s friendship and high opinion of him, finds him guilty of the same abjecting of reality as Saladin. This can be shown by citing his rejecting of all material wealth to live as a beggar, rather than to correct his inability to effectively function in Saladin’s court. Furthermore his skills at chess only highlight his Zoroastrian detachment. In chess he dissolves into a clear-cut, black-and-white world of representations, cut-off from all real consequences. The pieces signify war and political and spiritual power, and the black and white represents the struggle between good and evil, all in a way that is clearly shown, neat and free of too much complication. Furthermore the outcome of a match has almost no impact on happenings in the

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⁴ Eberle, Stephan. Lessing und Zarathustra, 73-130
real world. The chess-board is Al-Hafi’s world, a plane of pure logic, far removed from the often chaotic affairs of real human action.

In this way the character of Al-Hafi offers an interesting foil to Nathan. He too is enlightened, or 
 aufgeklärt, and in consequence free of intolerance. And yet this seems insufficient to bring him into the fold of the universal human family portrayed at the end of the play. In fact these good qualities have become his own kind of pseudo-religious abjection, one that admittedly does not lead to prejudice, but is still lacking from the ideal model presented in the character of Nathan. Lessing’s text seems to suggest here, rather than to provide an example of the universality of Kantian imperatives and transcendental-idealism, that the pure reason of the Aufklärung can also provide its own kind ascetic trap, and vigilant dedication to balancing idealism through prioritizing materialism is essential to the realization of enlightenment ideals.

With respect to this point, Nathan’s role as merchant attains greater importance. It is his business to attend to real material value and to intervene in its circulation. He gives generously, but, as a businessman, his giving, which, as shone in his donation to Saladin, is motivated by religion is also weighed with consideration of his money having real economic value within a social contract. Thus Saladin’s father and Nathan are brought thematically closer together, both representing an awareness and practice of fiscal responsibility. Nathan however, being much more present and active in the plot, demonstrates a kind of fiscal responsibility guided by a sense of social justice, which stems ultimately from his concern for the world and people around him – a concern essential both for good Samaritans and business people.

Schwärmerei

At this point it may seem that I have had to go to considerable interpretive efforts to prove the assertion that Lessing’s play critiques first and foremost religious abjecting of real-
world, primarily socio-economic concerns as a precursor to overcoming intolerance, but the play actually reveals this necessary step in a pretty straightforward manner. The reason why this point is often overlooked, is that most research, as has focused primarily on the *Ringparabel*, using the story-within-a-story as a starting point and then working from there, inside-out so to speak. This would result in the assumption that everything prior to the telling of the parable ought to be interpreted as a recreating of the conflict within the parable, and a setting up of the conditions for its telling, and with everything following the parable being read as the fulfillment of the promise of the parable in the main plot. This establishes the assumption that everything prior to the telling of the parable is not or only to a limited degree morally instructive.

In fact careful reading shows that the first lesson – one at first glance not directly connected to that of the *Ringparabel* – takes place very early in the text, already in the second scene of the first Act. The scene begins with Recha relating the tale of her rescue to her father, but describing it as if an angel had come to save her, rather than a human being: “Er [Gott] winkte meinem Engel, daß er *sichtbar* / Auf seinem weißen Fittiche, mich durch / Das Feuer trüge –“ (Lessing, 11 [Lessing’s emphasis]). But Nathan recognizes that his daughter, in the way she rewrites the history of the event, commits the same sin as Al-Hafi and Saladin in that she tries to remove her experience from the realm of the natural. He decodes her story in an aside: “(Weiβem Fittiche!/ Ja, ja! Der weiße vorgespitzte Mantel/ Des Tempelherrn)” (11). He admonishes her for her day-dreamy misrepresentation of events asking, “Wie? Weil/ Es ganz alltäglich klänge,/ Wenn dich ein Tempelherr/ Gerettet hätte, sollt’ es darum weniger/ Ein Wunder sein? – Der Wunder höchstes ist,/ Daß uns die wahren, echten Wunder so/ Alltäglich werden können, werden sollen” (12). Daja retorts, however, asking him what the harm in Recha’s viewing things in that way could be (12). Nathan responds:

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5 Maurer. Warren R.. “The Integration of the Ring Parable in Lessing’s ‘Nathan der Weise,’” 49
Nicht wahr? Dem Wesen, das
Dich rettete, - es sei ein Engel oder
Ein Mensch, - dem möchtet ihr, und du besonders,
Gern wieder viele große Dienste tun? –
Nicht wahr? – Nun, einem Engel, was für Dienste,
Für große Dienste könnt ihr dem wohl wohl tun?
Ihr könnt ihm danken; zu ihm seufzen, beten;
Könnt in Entzückung über ihn zerschmelzen;
Könnt am Tage seiner Feier fasten,
Almosen spenden. – Alles nichts. – Denn mich
Deucht immer, daß ihr selbst und euer Nächster
Hierbei weit mehr gewinnt, als er. Er wird
Nicht fett durch euer Fasten; wird nicht reich
Durch eure Spenden; wird nicht herrlicher
Durch eu’r Entzücken; wird nicht mächtiger

Nathan goes on to extrapolate on the dire consequences of Recha’s fancy: “Nun liegt er da! Hat weder Freund, noch Geld/ Sich Freunde zu besolden”; all consequences which are to be understood socio-economically and not spiritually (15). And as Recha’s worries reach a fever pitch, Nathan calms her, assures her that the Tempelherr is still alive, and then offers her and the audience/reader his first moral lesson of the play:

Begreifst du aber,
Wieviel andächtig schwärmen leichter, als
Gut handeln ist? Wie gern der schlaffste Mensch
Andächtig schwarmt, um nur, – ist er zu Zeiten
Sich schon der Absicht deutlich nicht bewußt –
Um nur gut handeln nicht zu dürfen? (16 [Lessing’s emphasis]).

This is the lesson, which must first be grasped before the parable of the rings can be grasped and truly appreciated. This is the Lesson, to which the emphasis of Italics is included – something that does not occur in the Ringparabel. Interestingly enough, italics are also the means by which the few stage directions present are given. Thus this lesson can be understood as so important, that it can be read as stage directions for the audience.
Some may read this moral instruction as a side note. Others may understand this to be an anecdote, necessary to establish the credibility of Nathan’s claim to wisdom early in the play. I wish to maintain however that the Ringparabel must be read in the context of this initial admonishment of abstracting into “Schwärmereien.”

Most scholarly research sees the characters in the play as representative of different levels of God’s great “Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts” with Nathan at the pinnacle. Although Christoph Schweizer makes the compelling argument, that Nathan is not a flat, finished character, but that he too develops as a character, his argument rests more with Nathan’s ability to practice what he preaches⁶. Either way, Nathan’s religious Weltanschauung, at least at a theoretical level, is complete at the outset of the play and remains the same throughout the progression of the plot. Thus it would be safe to say, that Nathan at no point would take back the admonishment he gives to Recha in act I.2. The admonishment then at the very least maintains intellectual contingency with Nathan’s own understanding of the meaning of the Ringparabel.

Returning to the admonishment of “Schwärmerei,” it is clear that Recha has –in all good-heartedness – rejected materiality. And this out of pride (“Stolz! und nicht als Stolz”) for, as Nathan explains metaphorically: “Der Topf/ Von Eisen will mit einer silbern Zange/ Gern aus der Glut gehoben sein, um selbst/ Ein Topf von Silber sich zu dünken” (Lessing, 14). In other words she has recast her recollection of events in order to better fit the construction of her ego, in the process mentally abjecting the real, physical existence of the man who saved her, and who in his humanness binds her identity to the material world. Nathan teaches her and the audience/reader that such thinking leads to an ignorance of real human suffering. This suffering furthermore takes the form of real socio-economic plight, since the Tempelherr faces death alone without friends or economic support. The solution Nathan offers also rings with an emphasis on

⁶ See Schweitzer’s “Die Erziehung Nathans”
economics, when Nathan advises her to focus her attention and efforts towards “gut handeln” (16). Of course good deeds are the intended message, and yet the use of the word “handeln” connotes Nathan’s status as merchant, thereby drawing a connection between moral and fiscal action and consideration. Though Recha thinks she is closer to God by purging herself from thoughts on the physical world of economic necessity, Nathan argues that she is ignoring the real form God takes in the world and her duties to God in the world. That is to say that God presents himself in the socio-economic structure of the world of human beings, and obedience to him is to be found there.

Therefore the introduction of a study of abjection in the play emphasizes the role of the material over the idealistic. Tolerance and intolerance take a back seat, since religious intolerance can only then take place, once the abstract ideals of religion supersede and reject the responsibilities of the economic realm here-and-now with its dirty, messy problems that bind individuals to each other.

**Ansteckung**

Turning attention to this notion of the “messiness” of socio-economic reality, one gains a better appreciation for the interstices between theories on abjection and religion when studying the “unclean.” Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger* that the anthropologist studying the moralities and ceremonies of various religions often react to the subjects of their research like the “agnostic sightseer in St. Peters shocked at the disrespectful clatter of adults and children playing Roman shovehalfpenny on the floor stones”; it is only when one turns to rituals of cleanliness, that one sees cultural ideas carried out in the full measure of their seriousness, so long as one first recognizes that “dirt is essentially disorder” (2). For Douglas, “dirt” lies at the heart of religious and cultural beliefs and values. Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* draws extensively on
Douglas’s research and augments to it the idea that the law of abjection first gives rise to notions of “dirt.” When analyzing dirt, it will also be important to understand it from the perspective of infectiousness. In *Totem und Tabu*, Freud argues that the nature of something that is considered taboo causes all that come into contact with it to become taboo as well, which in turn can spread its infectious character on further *ad nausium* (28).

One must thus look for several conditions, in order to meet a definition of uncleanliness satisfactory to the literature. First uncleanliness demands a crossing of a boundary, an exceptional state implying disorder or a threat to order. Second it must pose a social danger, since danger to the purity of the physical body, always reflects a danger to the social body. Finally the act must be contagious, spreading like a disease from body to body.

This is the case of Saladin’s mercy towards the Tempelherr, which although set before the opening scene of the play, does in fact qualify as the inciting incident, since it enables and drives the chain of events constituent of the plot. In the first case this moment exemplifies a break from the norm, since out of the twenty Templar knights captured he alone was spared (Lessing, 24). This act alone seems so extraordinary that Nathan refers to it as a “Wunder” in the very first scene of the play (8). The threat of danger also seems more or less self-evident, considering that in act I.5 the Patriarch plots to take advantage of Saladin’s mercy in order to assassinate him. Furthermore this can be understood not as a manifestation of power, – in accordance with Nietzsche’s views on mercy, elaborated in *Genealogie der Moral* (309) – but rather as a weakness (at least from the cold-blooded, emotionless perspective of *Realpolitik*), since Saladin acts purely out of sympathy and “bloße Leidenschaft,” because the Tempelherr’s appearance reminds him so much of his own brother (77). Thus a weakness both physical and

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7 See page 65 of *Powers of Horror*, “The Fundamental Work of Mary Douglas”
8 One of the fundamental claims of Douglas’s book. See following chapters: “External Boundaries” (115-129) and “Internal Lines” (130-140).
cultural exposes itself to danger. Lastly, this act sets off a chain of similar selfless acts that are causally and temporally connected; i.e. Saladin’s selfless act has become infectious.

The forgiven Tempelherr risks his life to rush into the burning house of a Jew to save Recha, and thereby commits an exceptional, boundary crossing, selfless act that exposes him to danger both physically and culturally by tying his affairs to those of the Jewish Nathan. Nathan in turn, out of gratefulness for his daughter’s safety, gives generously to Saladin, which compromises his identity as purely Jewish by getting him mixed up in the affairs of the Muslim state. And this mixing is certainly not without risk, as his time for reflection in act III.7 just before he tells the Ringparabel shows. In this moment Nathan recognizes he needs to be careful (“muß/ Behutsam gehn”) (Lessing, 70). A wrong answer could prove fatal. All of this demonstrates the contagious nature of Saladin’s single act of mercy.

This does not go unnoticed by the characters either. Nathan for instance marvels before Saladin: “Wie?/ So weißt du nicht, wie viel von deiner Gnade/ Für ihn [den Tempelherrn], durch ihn auf mich geflossen?” and Saladin agrees, adding, “Wie aus einer guten Tat,/ Gebar sie auch schon bloße Leidenschaft,/ Doch so viel andre gute Taten fließen!” (77). The goodness, which extends throughout the play, depends therefore on the acceptance of contaminating uncleanliness for the sake of empathy and gratefulness.

The above-cited remarks made by Saladin and Nathan also reflect the continuity between the “uncleanliness” of goodness and the moral imperative for economic awareness as opposed to mystic abstraction. In both quotes the speakers comment on the wonderful way in which goodness “flows” from person to person, deed to deed, much like currency across the market. These statements are also made at the closing of a transaction. Nathan has informed Saladin, “Fast hab ich/ Des baren Gelds zuviel…/ Ich weiß nicht recht, wo sicher damit hin. —/ Da dacht’
ich, ob du nicht vielleicht …/ etwas brauchen könntest“ (Lessing, 76). Saladin agrees of course, and this agreement allows cash to continue flowing throughout the kingdom, rather than stagnating in the bank. This agreement is also the next further progression of the likewise flowing, infectious goodness, in that Nathan is partially acting out of gratitude for his daughter’s rescue.

**Adoption**

The concept of a currency of goodness finds further support in Nathan’s first direct interaction with the Tempelherr. In the scene the Tempelherr refers to his life as Saladin’s gift, considering Saladin spared him from execution. In response Nathan remarks that this action has multiplied the blessing of life – “Durch das es mir/ Ein doppelt, dreifach Leben schenkte” (52). Here goodness is not only understood to flow, but it also generates value in compounding returns through the process of its own circulation. This fact will be used to show how Nathan’s own character and moral instruction, although rejecting the kind of abstracting, which leads other characters to seek holiness at the cost of their moral duties to the social fabric, still demands an adherence to the kind of abjective disassociation that makes productive exchange possible.

Helmut Schneider highlights in his analysis of Lessing’s drama that both Saldin’s act of grace and the Tempelherr’s heroic rescue of Recha stem initially from a physical passion rather than from reason or moral conviction. Saladin marvels at how such great things can come from one good deed, despite the lack of intent and the primary role of unreflective passion – “Gebar [diese Tat] auch schon bloße Leidenschaft” – as his motivation for forgiveness was aroused purely by the Tempelherr’s physical resemblance to Saladin’s own dear, lost brother (77). Similarly the Tempelherr describes his heroic act as more of suicide attempt than a selfless act of courage: “Mein Leben war mir ohnedem/ In diesem Augenblick lästig. Gern,/ Sehr gern ergriff
ich die Gelegenheit./ Sie für ein anderes Leben in die Schanze/ Zu schlagen…” (47). Though
both Saladin and the Tempelherr are capable of great acts, and seem to enjoy a natural drive,
which impels them to participate in the play’s moral economy, they are blind to the meaning and
impact of their actions. Saladin forgets that he even saved one of his captives, and the
Tempelherr despises Daja’s attempts to offer thanks. Only Nathan is capable of seeing the big
picture, and it becomes his task to clarify this to the other characters, by means of which he gains
favor with them and is able to finally bind the characters together in the economy of the family.

The trajectory of Nathan’s pedagogical interaction with the Tempelherr illustrates how
Nathan cultivates the kind of Weltanschauung that underlies the universal family at the play’s
close. At the outset of the play, the Tempelherr is preoccupied with his own ego-shaping
abjection. He casts himself in the role of the absolute outsider, performing it by rejecting Recha
and Daja’s thanks. Nathan is able to win him over, and talks him into visiting Recha. However
Nathan is soon called to Saladin’s palace, and then Recha and the Tempelherr meet, while he is
away. The Tempelherr falls desperately in love with her – a particularly dangerous turn of events
since only Nathan suspects the sibling relationship between the two, and cannot yet communicate
his suspicions. Thus it comes that Nathan must ward off the young man’s advances from his
adopted daughter.

In consideration of this conflict, Schneider understands Nathan as implementer of the
Inzestverbot with all of its Freudian implications (Schneider 315). In order to make matters right,
Nathan must effectuate a distancing, that enables the proper relationship between the characters
to take place. He does this by revealing the secret of the character’s relationship. While on the
one hand this revelation can be seen as undoing the abjection, which separated the characters via
their religious difference, it also restricts them from the possibility of sexual unity. Schneider
explains the conditions for the family in the play as a doubled distancing: “des Vaters von der Tochter (Adoption statt Geburt) und des Mannes von der Frau (innere Vorstellung statt körperliche Attraktion)” (319). In principle this distancing reflects the distancing Nathan imposes on the two saviors, Saladin and the Tempelherr, which brings them to appreciation of their actions.

As previously mentioned both characters performed good-deeds, based on passion. According to Schneider, Nathan’s success as moral instructor lies in his ability to recognize and effectively demonstrate that

die gute Tat, die spontan aus der ‘Natur’ hervorgeht, anderseits – und paradoxerweise – zugleich gleistet werden[muss], indem sie vom Handelnden bewußt anerkannt und zum Ausgangspunkt einer fortdauernden zwischenmenschlichen Verbindlichkeit genommen wird. […] Die Blindheit [d.h. die Unkenntnis der zwischenmenschlichen Verbindung, der die ‘natürliche’ gute Tat sich anfangs unbewusst widmet] zu überwinden und die ‘natürliche’ Rettungstat in den kommunikativen Kreislauf der Mittmenschlichkeit zu überführen, ist die Funktion des Dankes und der Dankbarkeit (307, 308).

In other words the immediate physicality of goodness has to be displaced into the communicative realm in order to effectively function in a moral economy of gratitude.

Rather than an opposite to abjection, Nathan assumes a middle position capable of moving about in exchange based economies. He brings Saladin, Recha and the Tempelherr out of their otherworldly delusions that rejected the material, but at the same time he does not let them dissolve into the world either; the siblings cannot be lovers, nor can Saladin and the Tempelherr be actual brothers. Nathan demonstrates this position through the dynamics of his relation to Recha. After losing his own family, Nathan swears revenge on the Christians, who burned down his house and kin. In this way he indulges in casting the Christianity and its followers off as abject. Yet in adopting the Christian-born Recha, he drops this position, and opens himself to
exchange. This openness to exchange is nowhere in the drama clearer then in Nathan’s conversation with the monk in act IV.7,

Hier braucht’s Tat!
Und ob mich siebenfache Liebe schon
Bald an dies einz’ge fremde Mädchen band,
Ob der Gedanke mich schon tötet, daß
Ich meine sieben Söhn’ in ihr aufs neue
Verlieren soll: - wenn sie von meinen Händen
Die Vorsicht wieder fordert, - ich gehorche! (111).

At the same time, he states:

… nennt mir nur geschwind
Den Mann, der ihr als Bruder oder Ohm,
Als Vetter oder sonst als Sipp’ verwandt:
Ihm will ich sie nicht vorenthalten – Sie,
Die jedes Hauses, jedes Glaubens Zierde
Zu sein erschaffen und erzogen ward (112).

In this way Nathan affirms his merchant’s Weltanschauung of a moral economy of goodness and gratitude in which exchange and exchangeability asserts primacy even upon the family, in that he recognizes the gaining of Recha as full compensation for the loss of his entire family, thus investing in her “siebenfache Liebe.” Moreover, despite his love he also demonstrates his willingness to abide by the social contract underpinning exchange, and thus to offer her up again to her true family, further subjecting the family – and by extension the human family – to the stipulations of the moral economy as sketched out above.

Thus the human family celebrated at the play’s end is an adoptive one, and as such has not only rejected the abstracting abjection, which substantiates the religious “family,” but also adopted a position which distances itself from others to a degree that embraces exchange. Hence morality and tolerance become possible, when people turn away from high-minded asceticism and mysticism, and see their physical actions as well as the actions of others as currents moving across a moral economy, which binds agents to each other, while maintaining their separateness
in their exchangeability. Within the framework of the moral economy, individuals come to recognize their identity in the family. This is the achievement demonstrated in the closing scene of “stummer Wiederholung allseitiger Umarmungen...” (140 [Lessing’s italics]).

**Conclusion**

According the logic of the text, the flow of goods and goodness form natural parallels, and an increased awareness for the one leads to a more developed appreciation of the other and vice-versa. Furthermore the progression of goods and goodness transgresses and defies a rigorously ascetic view of purity. This analysis has shown through careful study of the role of abjection in the text that the didactic message of *Nathan der Weise* levels a critique against the oft well-minded striving for theoretical purity within a religion, which rejects the economic nature of the real world with all its mixings, interdependences, hybrid forms and currents which flow across bodies. Hence the drama concerns itself with questions of materialism and idealism, operating on a philosophically sophisticated level, and is not a purely sentimental denouncement of religious intolerance, as has been claimed by much of the previous research, resulting in unfortunate criticism.

Lessing’s cure to this kind of over-abstracted thinking and the intolerance it can give rise to rests not simply in tolerance itself – an assumption which has falsely generated much of the negative critiques of *Nathan*’s didacticism, – but in an attentiveness to economic necessities and action, guided primarily by empathy. The interpellation of reason upon empathy binds the human family together and forms the basis of trust enabling an economic exchange of value, and subsequently of morality, which in the play is characterized by the motif of adoption. This substitutes material abjection for an individuality, which retains a certain degree of abjection (such as the *Inzestverbot* exemplified in Recha and the Temeplherr’s relationship) necessary to
provide space for the (former) abject into a new family that creates identity within its own economic framework.

Awareness of this often overlooked aspect of the moral and philosophical underpinnings of Lessing’s drama, may not be enough to bolster *Nathan der Weise* from the criticism brought against it, but it does correct some of the assumptions made about the naivety of the drama’s conclusion to help contextualize the ongoing critical debate, and introduces the concept of abjection to the discussion.
CHAPTER 3
THE COLLAPSE OF THE MORAL ECONOMY

Emotional Contagion and Unsettled Identity in Kleist’s Der Findling

If Lessing’s Nathan der Weise propounds, among other things, an economically rational morality in opposition to asceticism, mysticism and other indulgences in idealism, Kleist’s novella Der Findling complicates this message by entangling his characters in a social and fiscal economy, which corrupts to damnation those who would follow Lessing’s moral commands as discussed in the previous chapter. In order to unravel the various threads of the social economy presented, it will again be helpful to implement a critical analysis of the abject. In this case, however, less focus will be laid on the act of abjecting, and more on that, which creates the need to abject; that is the dangers to the singularity and robustness of the self among others. In Kleist’s story this danger finds its clearest expression in contagion, which will be shown to not only be of a physical, but also an emotional nature, steeped in sensation as well as interaction. But first it is necessary for the sake of continuity and clarity to demonstrate the intertextuality moving between Lessing’s Nathan and Kleist’s Findling.

Die alte Clique

As in Lessing’s play, Der Findling presents a wise and good merchant as its elderly protagonist. Like Nathan, Piachi hates above all “die Bigoterie” (Kleist, 54). Furthermore he loses his own son Paolo, but raises the adopted Nicolo, as if he were his own child, like Nathan does with Recha after the death of his sons. In a number of passages, Piachi weighs his moral decisions in very businessman-like way, thereby expressing the fulfillment of the aforementioned, complimentary double meanings of Nathan’s imperative towards “gut handeln.” Finally Antonio Piachi’s name contains all the letters necessary to spell Nathan – albeit with a
few leftovers, thus not as perfect as the Nicolo-Colino word-puzzle, but still telling, especially considering Kleist’s love of such alphabet games (Sembdner, 302).

Elvire shows correspondences to Lessing’s Recha. Both were rescued from a fire. Also, considering the relatively platonic nature of her marriage with Piachi and the respect and gratefulness that defines her attitude towards her husband, she can be considered in a sense an adopted child of the much older Antonio, who like Nathan takes her as his own after fate takes his first wife from him, and she survives a horrible event that befell her and her family. Her “Vergötterung” of her rescuer also points back to Recha, whom Nathan chastises for such behavior (Kleist, 72). Last but not least, Elvire Piachi also allows for a rearranging of letters that betrays the name “Recha.”

Finally the Genueser recalls the Tempelherr. In Elvire’s portrait he is dressed like a Ritter. He also saves Elvire as her family home burns down. In Nathan the Tempelherr scorched part of his coat in saving Recha. While rescuing Elvire, the Genueser throws his coat over the beam, on which Elvire stands – presumably in order to put out the encroaching flames separating them – which would certainly result the coat getting singed. Both rescuers were also raised by an uncle who lived in a European country west of the story’s place of action. In Lessing’s drama Nathan scolds Recha for her thoughtless praising devoid of corresponding deed by telling her that her savior may be sick and dying without anyone to attend to him. This becomes actuality in Kleist’s story, albeit with Elvire actively doing that, which Recha had at first neglected. Interestingly the rescuer dies nonetheless, unless one reads Nicolo as a kind of reincarnation or Doppelgänger of Colino, returning to her first a while after rescuing her, as the Tempelherr did, after first trying to avoid Recha. In reading the characters Colino and Nicolo as one or at least somewhat overlapping characters, and also intertextually bound to the Tempelherr in Nathan, it
follows that both Nicolo/Colino and Elvire are in a way the adopted children of Antonio Piachi, Elvire being the first of which to be adopted, just as Recha was first adopted by Nathan and then the Tempelherr, after recognizing that Recha is his sister, accepts Nathan as a father figure.

**Kinder sind die Pest**

Although in *Nathan* the notion of contagion is used to highlight a moral instruction, it certainly has fatally real consequences for Kleist’s characters. In *Der Findling*, the first obvious mention of disease appears as early as the first paragraph, where a plague outbreak in Ragusa prevents Piachi from completing his intended business there. As the disease worsens, “so überwand die Sorge für seinen Sohn alle kaufmännischen Interessen“, and he departs from the area with his son (53). On the one hand, it is only natural that the increasing health risk would impact Piachi’s decision, especially in consideration of his son. On the other hand the language used, particularly the verb “überwinden,” describes a struggle between worry and interest, which can be further abstracted to a struggle between emotion and reason – at least of the economic sort. In this way one can read Piachi’s act at the beginning of story, which normally would point to a positive, morally correct decision, as indicative of the same kind sin committed by Recha in the opening act in *Nathan*: namely in that he lets his emotions get the better of solid, economically based reasoning. Also not to overlook is the proportional relation between the conquest of disease over health, and high-pitched emotion over reason and fiscal responsibility, since the intensification of the disease corresponds to the rising of Piachi’s concern. A few more examples should confirm this association as a leitmotif throughout the text.

On the way back, Piachi encounters Nicolo for the first time. He stops his wagon to inquire as to what he wants. The boy responds by saying, “er sei angesteckt [und dementsprechend auch ansteckend]; . . . er bitte um aller Heiligen willen, ihn mitzunehmen und
nicht in der Stadt umkommen zu lassen“ (52, 53). Before going further it is necessary to discuss the conditions, which lead Piachi to stop in the first place. Piachi notices the boy, “der nach Art der Flehenden die Hände zu ihm ausstreckte und in großer Gemütsbewegung zu sein schien”; in other words Piachi stops because of the apparently intense emotions the boy demonstrates via his gestures, which appear to be communicatively successful in that they catch Piachi’s attention and seem to arouse at least enough sympathy or pity to bring him to a halt (52). Moreover this emotional demonstration is the product, not only of a very emotional boy, but also a very contagious one at that.

Then the boy “faßte . . . des Alten Hand, drückte und küßte sie und weinte darauf nieder“ (53). All of this is especially contaminating since Piachi comes into contact with both skin and saliva from the sick child. However he also comes into contact with another bodily fluid: the boy’s tears. Thus the emotional is again associated with a contaminating illness, and the intensification of the boy’s demonstration of emotion corresponds, causally and temporally, to a rise in Piachi’s risk of contamination.

Piachi’s reaction to the intensification of the danger reflects those outlined in his decision to flee Ragusa. “Piachi wollte in der ersten Regung des Entsetzens den Jungen weit von sich schleudern, doch da dieser in ebendiesem Augenblick seine Farbe veränderte und ohnmächtig auf den Boden niedersank, so regte sich des guten Alten Mitleid“; he then brings the boy up into the wagon with him and his own son (53). Thus once again Piachi finds himself caught between two forces. This time both are described as emotional – “Entsetzen” vs. “Mitleid” – and both are related to reference to the word “regen” (“Regung des Entsetzens”; “regte sich… Mitleid”).

Though both responses are emotional, the disgust – or abjection as it could also be translated – implies a self-preserving instinct. And indeed, as Kristeva’s insights on abjection
show, the preservation of the self in this context relies on a throwing away of that which the self must reject to maintain its identity, in this case literally in terms of “schleudern.” The self, which wishes to preserve itself, refers in this case to a successful businessman, and the instinct towards self-preservation, though here not described as rational, is the basis of any competitive market system and certainly an instinct any successful merchant should adhere to. In the end, however, he gives in to that other emotion, which is less common in the dog-eat-dog economic struggle for profit: sympathy. Self-sacrificing sympathy’s Überwindung of Piachi’s self-preserving instinct of disgust and abjection reflects his decision to leave Ragusa insofar that, as the boy succumbs to the disease and loses power over his self, Piachi succumbs to his sympathy. This contrasts to his first instinct (“in der ersten Regung des Entsetzens”), in that he chooses not to cast the other away, but to bring him closer into union with himself, despite incurring the risk of contagion. As discussed earlier regarding Piachi’s decision to leave Ragusa, the increasing severity of disease proportionally relates to Piachi’s concern for a son figure, at the cost of his own, “rational” self-interest.

**Emotionale Ansteckung**

Several pertinent features form a constellation here in these first two paragraphs, one that seeps throughout the entire text, and the relation of these elements deserves explaining, in order to understand the internal logic of the text. So far my analysis has shown a metaphorical relationship between disease and emotional drive, in which emotions override the character’s body and lead the character to abnormal behavior. Furthermore these emotions have origins external to the character. In Ragusa Paichi’s worry stems from external danger to his son; on the road his sympathy is aroused by Nicolo. In the later example, the emotions can be seen as transference of emotions from the boy to Piachi, conveyed through Nicolo’s physical gestures.
and actions, such as flailing, crying and passing out. This constellation portrays an excellent example of what Hatfield et. al. term “emotional contagion.”

In an article of the same title, psychologists discuss the causes of the relatively common phenomena of “catching” someone else’s emotions or emotional state. Emotional contagion differentiates from primitive empathy in that it is much more subtle, complex and unconscious. Feeling sorry for someone, say, suffering torture would be an example of primitive empathy, we can understand their suffering and have pity on them. Emotional contagion in contrast can happen in an office of four employees, where three of which are feeling good and working happily, when the fourth comes into the room and, without saying or doing anything other than perhaps making a glum face, suddenly sends out a “negative vibe” and a general sense of gloominess seems to seep throughout the office “infecting” the entire staff.

Hatfield et.al. identify three propositions, which synchronize to create this seemingly supernatural kind of experience. The first proposition is mimicry, which here refers to the fact that “[i]n conversation, people automatically and continuously mimic and synchronize their movements with the facial expressions, voices, postures movements and instrumental behaviors of others” (97). This happens with almost perfect precision and completely subconsciously. The second proposition is that feedback plays a significant role in our emotional state. One normally thinks of gesture, facial expressions and certain movements as expressive gestures, that demonstrate already felt emotions. Emotions are understood as being an inward action, which produce gesture as outward reaction and demonstration. However, the opposite is also true. “When people [produce] facial expression of fear, anger, sadness, or disgust, they [are] likely to feel the emotion associated with those expressions” and that, even when making those expressions on command, without any prior existing emotional state reflective of the
corresponding feeling (98). The final proposition of contagion argues that “[c]onsequently, people tend, from moment to moment to ‘catch’ other people’s emotions”, because they are continuously mimicking their expressions and gestures, which conjures up within them the very emotions those gestures convey (99). It is important to note that this theory suggests the inner boundaries of the self to be permeable and that emotions are understood to travel between selves, rather than bound to the self as an original product of the ego. Thus Piachi is moved by Nicolo, only in response to his physical demonstration of emotional distress.

As aforementioned, Piachi’s concern is first aroused when, Nicolo “nach Art der Flehenden die Hände zu ihm ausstreckte und in großer Gemütsbewegung zu sein schien“ (52). Piachi’s command to stop the wagon would imply he has to some degree “caught” the sense of urgency, which plagues the boy. Furthermore it is not the desperateness of the situation, caused by the fact that Nicolo passes out that first gives rise to pity’s\textsuperscript{9} victory over abjection, but first and foremost that “dieser in eben diesem Augenblick seine Farbe veränderte und ohnmächtig auf den Boden niedersank” (53 [my emphasis]). Hence by means of going pale – a facial expression – does Nicolo manage to successfully infect Piachi with his own distress.

**Was man bei der Adoption in Kauf nimmt**

After Piachi hoists the child up on the wagon with him and his son, all three are rounded up by the authorities and sent to the hospital, “wo er zwar, Piachi, gesund blieb und Nicolo, der Knabe, sich von dem Übel wieder erholt: sein Sohn aber, der elfjährige Paolo, von demselben angesteckt ward und in drei Tagen starb” (53). Piachi takes Nicolo home where he and his second wife, Elvire, care for him as if he were their own son, later adopting him.

\textsuperscript{9} For a more exhaustive elaboration on empathy and sympathy, see Daniel C. Batson’s “These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena.”
As in *Nathan*, where adoption is to be understood as endemic of an economic-minded worldview, which interprets value in its exchange, similar implications occur in *Der Findling*. Elvire shows the orphan to Paolo’s room and offers him “sämtliche Kleider desselben zum Geschenk”, which underscores that Nicolo, more than simply being adopted, is actually replacing Paolo (55). Further evidence for this is offered by the reasoning for the adoption: “da [Piachi], auf eine leicht begreifliche Weise, den Jungen in dem Maße liebgewonnen, als er ihm teuer zu stehen gekommen war, so adoptierte er ihn...“ (55). This phrasing echoes Nathan’s feelings towards his own adopted daughter, after losing his seven sons:

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Und ob mich siebenfache Liebe schon
Bald an dies einz’ge fremde Mädchen band,
Ob der Gedanke mich schon tötet, daß
Ich meine sieben Söhn’ in ihr auß neue
Verlieren soll (Lessing, 111).
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The difference here is that Kleist’s language is even more invested in economic terms than Lessing’s. Whereas Nathan fears losing his sons in Recha, Piachi’s adopted son was a “teuer“ purchase.

In my analysis of *Nathan*, adoption was shown to have characteristics indicative of the principles of contagion. This was however necessary in order to ground a stabile “moral economy,” within which the family unit functioned. In *Der Findling* contagion also functions as impetus and enabler of Nicolo’s adoption. However, Piachi’s emotions are described as weighed out in terms of cost and value. Emphasis in the metaphorical relationship of family and economy has shifted: Whereas the “moral economy” undergirded and validated Nathan’s family, members of Piachi’s family are subservient to and implicated in an “emotional economy,” which in the Marxist sense alienates them from identity. Recha’s value is transferred from Nathan’s sons, but is invested in her. Kleist’s language suggests, however, that Nicolo’s value is not transferred
from Paolo, but created in the exchange itself, formed in the eruption of Piachi’s grief. The zero sum game of Lessing’s moral mercantilism gives way to the virulent exchanges of Kleist’s emotional capitalism. Thus the text presents the personal and interpersonal interplay of emotions as both economic and pollutant. Whereas Nathan acts within an epidemic/economic moral framework, Kleist confronts his readers with an epidemic/economic view of emotions.

According to Schneider, Lessing’s idea of tolerance and therefore moral economy rests on the assumption of a general brotherly love that is universal and constitutive of humanity. This notion – comparable to that of “primitive empathy” – becomes greatly complicated, when Kleist introduces emotional contagion (308). Hence the presumably stable emotional bond, upon which Lessing’s moral economy in Nathan rests, is upset as Kleist opens up this field to its own economic agency in Findling. This twist lays the groundwork for understanding how Piachi comes to be a veritable “Anti-Nathan.”

Schlag ein

The initiation of the emotional into a social fabric of exchange that resembles that of currency and disease is signaled, when Nicolo grabs Piachi’s hand. This gesture carries real and symbolic weight that must be understood in medical, affective and economic terms. At the level of disease, this contagious contact seals Paolo’s fate. At the emotional level, in which the contact – especially in connection with Nicolo’s kisses and tears – can be understood as sign of affection; it immediately precedes the tidal change in Piachi’s feelings toward the boy, awakening the sympathy, which quickly overcomes his disgust, and later gives way to love. Piachi is in a double sense “berührt” by Nicolo. This exchange of Paolo for Nicolo can be understood as a more or less economic transaction, whose conclusion is demonstrably affirmed via Handschlag.
The Handschlag as symbol for an exchange with fatal consequences operating on the levels of disease, emotion and finance finds its echo in Elvire and her Genoese rescuer’s last farewell. Their final scene takes place in his hotel room, which has been converted into a sort of hospital room: “nach einem dreijährigen höchst schmerzvollen Krankenlager, währenddessen das Mädchen nicht von seiner Seite wich, reichte er ihr noch einmal freundlich die Hand und verschied“ (58). Although suffering a traumatic head injury, and not a contagious illness, this handclasp nonetheless has a contagious effect, since, as we are told, the trauma of the sick young man’s passing leaves Elvire with psychological scars with, it may be inferred, somatic consequences in the form of a terrible fever two years thereafter that leave her with an “überreizten Nervensystem“ (58). There is also a clear emotional transference, as implied in the “freundlich“ nature of the gesture as well the fact that this “rührend[er] Vorfall“ is responsible for the “stillen Zug von Traurigkeit [in ihrem] Gemüt“ (56). Finally this also signifies the exchange that follows, by which Piachi comes to take the place of her Genoese love. A transition not without economic consequence. Not only does his death create a vacuum for Piachi to fill, it also seems that Piachi’s relationship with his wife is more that of a caretaker. Thus the emotional and somatic loss also proves constituent to the exchange of the Genoese for Piachi. The act of marriage also seems to carry the same deal-closing symbolism as the handshake/handclasp, especially in consideration of such phrases as “take her hand in marriage” (um ihre Hand anhalten). In brief, this Handschlag between Elvire and her lover, like that between Piachi and Nicolo, can also be read as contaminating, affective and economically consequent. This mixture of medical, emotional and financial factors creates the conditions for an exchange, in which one human life is lost and subsequently replaced with another. In the very same gesture, this exchange is also implicitly affirmed.
Die Moral geht zu Grunde

The question is now how to interpret the connections bound up in this gesture. Since the intertextual relation between Nathan and Der Findling has already been shown, it proves useful to first look at Lessing’s views on gesture. In Hamburgische Dramaturgie Lessing describes gesture’s role as follows: “das Symbolische der Moral wiederum auf das Anschauende zurückzubringen” (27). It is difficult to assume that the gestures in Kleist’s novella portray any moral argument, given the moral backwardness of all the characters at some point or another and the story’s explicit denial of any kind of Erlösung at the conclusion, and perhaps that is exactly the point. Lessing’s idea of gesture as a movement from an inner truth towards its outward demonstration reflects Schneider’s analysis of morality, as presented in Nathan.10

Schneider interprets the acts of grace and rescue in Nathan as incidents that show that such altruistic behavior obeys a kind of instinctive impulse, which proves an original human morality – in short: “die Lebensrettung repräsentiert für Lessing die Schnittstelle, an der die Kultur aus der Natur hervorgeht“ (307). Schneider continues to demonstrate how this natural tendency must be recognized by the actors – a job for the Aufklärung – in order to enter into the “Kreislauf der Dankbarkeit,” or as I put it in the previous chapter: the moral economy (308). The basis of Lessing’s moral economy is then a “zwischenmenlichen Verbindlichkeit,” stemming from nature and then recognized and affirmed by reason to guarantee its continuation through a cycle of gratitude (308). Hence it has a kind of “gold standard” guaranteed in human emotion.

In his study of standing and falling in Kleist’s work, Schneider notices that “the ‘truth’ of [Kleistian] body language is inextricably connected to a particular set of contingent circumstances in which the narrative figure acts and reacts; manifestations of the soul turn into a

10 David E. Smith analyses the relation between Lessing and Kleist’s theories and uses of gesture in Gesture as a Stylistic Device in Kleist’s “Michael Kohlhass” and Kafka’s “Der Prozess,” specifically on pages 14-43.
function of the external scene and must be read accordingly” (503). At issue here is then a blurring of internal and external that would not be possible within the strict parameters of demonstrability, under which Lessing places his moral gestures.

That the Zuschlag in Kleist’s novella represents an exchange not only of deeds (Lessing’s economy is one of trans\textit{action}) but also of emotion destabilizes the whole market. This explains the grounds for some of the novella’s earliest criticism that the characters’ actions seemed devoid of justifiable motives. The relationship of actor to action has lost the certainty that was found in a moral economy, in which actors behaved as rational merchants and trading actions that were admittedly exchangeable, but were nonetheless distinct – to once again use the Marxist term – “alienated” from those trading. Kleist’s novella uses a more complicated understanding of the relationships between emotions, the self and the other to blur this distinction and therewith implicate the actors fully into an emotional economy, in which \textit{they} become alienated from themselves. Piachi has lost the distinction between property and proprietor that Nathan enjoys.

\textbf{Das Ich wird angesteckt}

Piachi demonstrates this loss of a secure ego by signing over his property to his adopted son, who then in turn uses this act of kindness, not to further the “Kreislauf der Dankbarkeit,” but to claim himself as rightful head of the house. In essence Piachi has not simply traded property or act (“deed,” in the double sense of the word) but himself, at least his social, familial, and to a degree also narrative position. The structure of the narration reinforces this exchange, since after signing over his property to Nicolo, the narrator turns focus away from Piachi and begins to follow Nicolo more closely.

Irmgard Wagner sums up the consequences of this absolute exchangeability as a destabilizing, deconstructive rupture, in the wake of which “[t]he structure of individual identity
that anchors consciousness of the self and the status of the subject has given way to free-floating interchangeability as Nicolo is or is not Colino” (291). Thus individuals become placeholders of narrative function as well as emotion, who work as disassociated signifiers exchanging among themselves without any grounding basis, such as the imperative of gratitude in Nathan. By breaking with the certainty of the self as an agent, whose emotions are contained in an autonomous Innenwelt, and whose portrayal through gesture into the Außenwelt enables exchange and economic thinking, Kleist’s characters rock the moral economy off its hinges, rob reason of its claim to inner truth by corrupting the one-way channel from Innenwelt to Außenwelt, and thus portray a model of human affairs, whose nature is more epidemic than economic.

The decentralization of the Innenwelt in Der Findling is not, however, presented as a given. Part of the allure of the text is the narrator’s implied appeal to the promise of a grounded moral economy throughout the story coupled with its very dissolution, leaving the reader with a chilling and disorienting sensation. Marjorie Gelus has commented on how the novella is full of issues presented as self-evident that may actually be profoundly puzzling. This neatly resembles the work of a magician, whose graceful movements serve ostensibly to demonstrate the ordinariness of the props and the authenticity of the magic, yet are in fact designed for the purpose of diverting the audience’s attention to the inessential so that the actual sleight of hand can be accomplished unnoticed (543).

This is especially true of Piachi’s portrayal.

“Der gute Alte”

For instance, the very Piachi who was just short of throwing a sick child away to suffer alone, is in the same sentence praised by the narrator for “des guten Alten Mitleid“ (53). Through description and the genitive case the reader is misled to understand Piachi as by nature good and sympathetic, when, as has just been shown, the sympathy’s origins are best understood as
predominantly external and in contrast to Piachi’s “natural“ instincts. Gelus also mentions the oddness of Elvire’s remarkable preoccupation with locking doors, opening the possibility to suspect that she may – perhaps with good reason – fear Piachi (Gelus, 547). Another “sleight of hand“ trick the narrator uses to conceal Piachi from suspicion is a lack of information on his dealings. One would certainly have to wonder in what way “der gute Alte“ managed to get Nicolo’s letter to Xerviera from her young servant girl “halb mit List, halb mit Gewalt“ and still live up to his title (61). The success of the illusion depends on the reader identifying with Piachi and Elvire’s outrage, rather than critically reflecting on what is implied with such trickery and violence. Thus the reader too proves susceptible to the emotional contagion seething throughout the story. The reader’s outrage is exploited again near the end of the story: “nahm er bloß, indem er die Vorhänge des Bettes, auf welchem [Elvire] ruhte, zuzog die Peitsche von der Wand, öffnete [Nicolo] die Tür und zeigte ihm den Weg, den er unmittelbar wandern sollte“ (73).

Caught in the fever of seeing the incestuous rapist and usurper brought to justice by his victims, one might overlook the bizarre and likely damning fact that Piachi, who seems to be sexually uninvolved with Elvire, keeps a whip hidden in his wife’s bedroom. How in the world could “der gute Alte“ have use for that? His final wish to complete his revenge in damnation leaves little room for speculation on some innate, indispensable human goodness, since any assumed “Kreislauf der Dankbarkeit,“ which in Piachi’s case would mean accepting the grace of the Christian savior and in turn forgiving his adoptive son, is pushed into insignificance by an insatiable appetite for revenge.

Throughout the narration the reader is nonetheless encouraged to maintain the image of Piachi as the gracious old man, whose emotions are genuinely indicative of some absolute moral 

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11 Séan Allan’s *The Stories of Heinrich von Kleist: Fictions of Security* gives wonderful insight into the marriage between Piachi and Elvire that Allan characterizes as perhaps “lacking in passion, but… not devoid of genuine affection” (161).
truth, the certainty of which (as in *Nathan*) is suggested but cannot be confirmed by its contrast to the “Bigotterie“ of the church. The narrator shares or tries to convey the very convictions that underpin Lessing’s drama. The outcome of these assumptions leads, however, to such mysterious and absurd conclusions as a righteous man, who kills his adopted son and longs for eternity in Hell, not out of penance but out of hate. As Gelus concludes, the unsatisfying oddness of the story demands the reader question the narrative assumptions (550). This means to go back and see the characters in light of their complications that do not fit into the *Weltanschauung* of the moral economy, through which Kleist’s narrator vainly tries to conceive them. First the reader must reject the assumptions of an innate “zwischenmenschliche Verbindlichkeit“ and the stability of the borders between *Innenwelt* and *Außenwelt*. He or she must instead take into account the notion of self that emotional contagion presents: A vessel of emotional transference that does not necessarily imply a bond or “Verbindlichkeit.“ Such a reading demystifies the story and allows one to recognize the characters as unstable and caught up in a dizzying exchange of identities unbound by the fetters of natural morality, which in Lessing’s worldview provide the stable boundaries between adoption and effacement.

**Zusammenfall**

Bianca Theisen shows the breakdown of identities in their exchangeability as a central motif in Kleistian literature, represented by collapse. “There is no simultaneity but in collapse“ (514). She explains how after Elvire loses consciousness at the sight of Nicolo dressed as the Genoese after the masquerade, “Nicolo will try to set himself up in the position of the Genoese knight, Elvire’s savior, collapsing the distinction savior/seducer in a space where Nicolo is and is not Colino at the same time“ (515). Thus Kleist’s characters occupy a space, not of the
possibility of exchange as in Lessing, but of the absoluteness of exchange, where exchange already rules out any stabile identity outside of the domain of exchange.

The scene Theisen analyzes also contains indicators of contagion. The precondition of this chance encounter is that on that night Elvire goes into the kitchen to get bottle of vinegar for Piachi, who suddenly has fallen somewhat ill – „[dem] plötzlich eine Unpäßlichkeit zugestoßen war“ (59). “Eben hat sie einen Schrank… geöffnet. . . als Nicolo die Tür sachte öffnete und mit einem Licht, das er sich auf dem Flur angesteckt hatte, ... durch den Saal ging” (59). Not only are these two sequences of Elvire’s searching and Nicolo’s entering simultaneous, as Theisen’s study of the “eben-als” construction in Kleist’s works makes clear\(^\text{12}\), they are also of sympathetic content as both characters are occupied with the opening of doors. Moreover Kleist plays with the idea of disease down to the level of the signifier, using the verb “anstecken” here to refer to lighting a candle. However, the candlelight betrays Nicolo, and leads to Elvire’s collapse, which culminates in the collapse of Nicolo and Colino’s identity. The virulent play of the signifier asserts itself in a subsequent identity collapse at the end of the scene, since the sick Piachi, who was originally being cared for by Elvire has to come to her rescue: “Bald darauf… krank wie er war, aus dem bette gesprungen war und sie aufgehoben hatte” (60). Thus by the same token the sick/caretaker distinction also collapses. Hence it is not only emotion that passes between permeable bodies, like a disease, but identity and social roles as well. Kleist’s language reinforces the metaphorical relation between exchange, both affective and relative, and contagion.

One can summarize the observations made here into two general guidelines for navigating the logic of the text: 1) Emotions act as a destabilizing element by breaking down the autonomy of the self through their contagiousness, which by nature undermines the distinction of

\(^{12}\) Theisen, 514
Innen- and Außenwelt; 2) Through this destabilization signifiers detach from the signified and identity becomes exchangeable. Now, considering the importance of gesture, not only its act, but also its viewing to the effectiveness of emotional contagion one can synthesize the first two observations: 3) Affective viewing, i.e. observing emotion with emotion gives rise to the kind of identification where the self collapses into the other. This kind of contagion facilitates especially dramatic developments in the text, when expressions of emotions are misunderstood. The slippage between Nicolo/Colino follows this very trajectory.

Fehldeutung

This slippage gains its initial possibility in Nicolo’s misreading of Elvire’s body language, when she catches him with Xaviera’s handmaiden. In this moment “war ihm Elvire niemals schöner vorgekommen“ (63). By means of emotional contagion the same “Unwille, der sich mit sanfter Glut ihren Wangen entzündete“ riles Nicolo up so much, “[e]r glühte vor Begierde“ (63). The echo of Elvire’s “Glut” in Nicolo’s “Glühen“ illustrates a cause and effect relationship in the order of emotional contagion. Only here it is not the same emotion that transfers, since in the process of decoding her body language, Nicolo mistakes Elvire’s nature (although perhaps not) and thereby “catches” the wrong emotion, (if we are to trust the narrator, in assuming that the source of Elvire’s blushing really is “Unwille”).

Having lodged his desire in Elvire’s (imagined) desire, the stage is now set for Nicolo to identify with the image of Colino. With his desire for his stepmother awakened, he hears speaking coming from her room: “Von raschen, heimtückischen Hoffnungen durchzuckzt beugte [Nicolo] sich mit Augen und Ohren gegen das Schloß nieder, und… Da lag [Elvire] in der Stellung der Verzückung zu jemandes Füßen” (63). In this moment both characters form physical and emotional parallels. Nicolo leans “niegdergebeugt” and “durchzuckt” with vile hope, while
Elvire “lag” overcome with “Verzückung.” Visually however they and their gaze form a chain leading from Nicolo through Elvire toward the image of Colino. In this way Nicolo can be understood to desire to Colino through Elvire in that he will wish to become the object of desire for his object of desire. Thus one can summarize the depiction of Nicolo’s developing self in this scene in Lacanian terms, in which Colino serves as the model for the ideal self and Elvire that of the spectral self. Furthermore it is important to recognize the role in which identification with Elvire and the force of desire play in arranging this tableau.

When Nicolo takes Xaviera and Klara with him to closer observe the painting, it is first Klara, who points out the resemblance. Nicolo’s response is as perplexing as it is revealing about the nature of the text. He responds, “Wahrhaftig, liebste Klara, das Bild gleicht mir, wie du demjenigen, der sich dein Vater glaubt!” (66). Gelus provides a compelling analysis of this statement, showing that “on the one level the equation serves merely to dismiss the notion of resemblance” and yet, on another level it “suggests that in fact there is a resemblance,” and this implies, “that the visual resemblance might hinge on a readjustment of focus, and show[s] how malleable the evidence is” (546). The image then only offers the possibility of identification, but does not demand it. That Nicolo identifies with it stems less from appearance and more from the desire to be identical to it.

Since the logic of the text allows for emotional transference between Nicolo and Elvire, and since even this transference, which already disturbs the neatness of a moral economy, is capable of corruption through misinterpretation and misunderstanding, it allows for the disastrous collapse of the otherwise radically opposed identities of Nicolo/Colino, that is of rapist and rescuer – a convolution of identity also found in Kleist’s Die Marquise von O…. It is then no stretch to claim that a similar process takes place in corrupting the distinction between
Piachi/Nicolo. I have already talked about the *Handschlag* being indicative of both an exchange of Paolo for Nicolo and Colino for Piachi. Thus by taking the place of Colino, Nicolo also assumes the vacuum Piachi claims to fill. This will be used to explain why it is that when Nicolo is caught in the act of trying to rape Elvire, the pendulum of power swings so quickly back and forth.

**Machtschwingungen**

Upon Piachi’s arrival on the scene Nicolo first “warf sich, da seine Büberei auf keine Weise zu bemänteln war, dem Alten zu Füßen, und bat ihn, unter der Beteuerung, den Blick nie wieder zu seiner Frau zu erheben, um Vergebung” (73). His body language thus displays submission and would imply the sincerity of his pleas for forgiveness. Piachi is at first simply “sprachlos,” though apparently willing to offer forgiveness and only after Elvire says something – though we do not find out what – does Piachi seem to recognize he ought to assume authority, which he does rather drastically: by grabbing a whip and “öffnete ihm die Tür und zeigte ihm den Weg, den er unmittelbar wandern sollte” (73). Unbelievably enough, at this very moment when Piachi makes his authority felt, Nicolo, who has just given himself over in full shame and surrender, “plötzlich vom Fußboden erstand und erklärte: an ihm, dem Alten, sei es, das Haus zu räumen, denn er durch vollgültige Dokumente eingesetzt, sei der Besitzer und werde sein Recht, gegen wen immer auf der Welt es sei, zu behaupten wissen!” (73). It appears that neither Piachi nor Nicolo is certain, which one of them is or should be in charge. Both challenge the other, and yield to the other.

Piachi, “durch diese unerhörte Frechheit wie entwaffnet”, retreats with his hat and cane like a feeble old man and passes out upon reaching the house of his lawyer friend, unable to even speak, or to motion to his wife to follow him (73). And yet in his confusion, Piachi once again
tries to claim what he believes to be rightfully his, this time in a court of law – and fails. But
Nicolo is also not entirely certain of his position, and begs the Karmelitermönchen “ihn gegen
den alten Narren… zu beschützen” (74). This back-and-forth of uncertain power is indicative of
the unstable relation of self to identity resulting from the emotional and identity-based
transactions, which both characters were at one point or another complicit in.

In recognition of this, one can view the final outcome events with Piachi chasing Nicolo
into Hell as the unavoidable outcome of the unsettlable entanglement of their identities. Like
Schrödinger’s cat, occupying two states of being in the same moment of the same reality, the
result of the Nicolo/Colino/Paolo/Piachi conflation can only be settled in non-Euclidean space.
In order to understand the event that made this transition from the impossible collapse of identity
to its endless conclusion in the non-Euclidean dimensions of the afterlife possible, one must
consider the role of that other signifier, which supplemented and thereby gave meaning to the
signifier/position over which the male characters quarrel and trade, namely: that of the wife.

**Hinter jedem großen Mann steht eine große Frau**

According to the diegetic chronology (rather than the narrative layout) of the story, Piachi first becomes relevant to the narration when he “takes Elvire’s hand” in marriage, putting
himself in in the role of Colino. He further consolidates his claim to this position by inverting the
caretaker/sick role she and Colino played while Colino was dying, putting Piachi closer to
Colino’s original function of savior. Although Piachi sets Nicolo on the wagon in his son’s place,
it is Elvire who officiates the exchange by means of granting him Paolo’s old room and
“sämtliche Kleidung” (55). His adoption is explicitly “mit Einwilligung der guten Elvire” (55). It
is only by virtue of betrothing himself to his own wife, that Nicolo wins himself enough of
Piachi’s favor that his adoptive parents ascribe him the majority of their estate – “beide Eltern
vereinigten sich in der Zufriedenheit mit ihm, und um ihm davon einen Beweis zu geben, ward ihm eine glänzende Ausstattung zuteil, wobei sie ihm einen beträchtlichen Teil ihres schönen und weitläufigen Wohnhauses einräumten” – and this is not just because he married any woman, but specifically “einer jungen liebenswürdigen Genueserin, Elvirens Nichte, die unter ihrer Aufsicht in Rom erzogen wurde” (56). One could assume that thanks to the aforementioned signing over of property, Nicolo would have been able to assert his dominance over Piachi at any time. But he does not, and only dares to after managing to shame Elvire. It turns out then that the real claim to be laid is on Elvire, who functions as the only pseudo-voucher of authority in an emotional and social economy gone astray.

It is then of no small meaning that Nicolo guaranties his legal status, “da er Xavieren, welche der Bischof los zu sein wünschte, zu heiraten willigte” (74). In the sentence that follows, but in a new paragraph we discover, “Piachi hatte gerade Tags zuvor die unglückliche Elvire begraben, die an den Folgen eines hitzigen Fiebers, das ihr jener Vorfall zugezogen hatte, gestorben war” (74). It is often understood that “jener Vorfall” refers to her rape. Or perhaps it is in reference to the “Dekret” declaring Nicolo the rightful master of the house, which immediately precedes the above quoted sentence (74). But maybe “jener Vorfall” is the precondition of said Dekret, also contained in the preceding sentence, namely Nicolo’s marriage to Xaviere. This becomes all the more intriguing in consideration of Elvire’s previous “hitzigen Fieber, in welches sie gleich nach ihrer Verheiratung verfiel” (59 [my emphasis]). This repetition of the same symptom following the wedding of the “true” master of the Piachi household suggests that the fever is the cost exacted on Elvire’s body for the constant exchange through which men establish themselves in an unstable environment by laying claim to her.
Her replacement in Xaviere pushes her into irrelevance and leaves her to the same fate. Paolo and Colino suffered for their exchangeability. Even the name of her replacement strangely echoes her own name. It would seem, Xaviere literally X-es Elvire out of the narrative.

**Ewige Heimzahlung**

Piachi, however, remains leftover like an unsettled account, a remainder that cannot be accounted for and yet cannot be overlooked. Nicolo has successfully taken the place of Piachi by taking his wife – the object, which grounds him as subject. Yet he has not and cannot do away with Piachi himself. Nicolo is now exactly like Piachi at the story’s outset: a wealthy merchant, deprived through death of his first son from his first marriage and now established in his second marriage to a woman who has, but never married, another lover, while Piachi now struggles without home, family or status, an unaccounted for, impossible, erratic signifier – a “Findling.” Thus the exchange of identities has reached its full one hundred eighty degrees, and it has only gained in momentum. Through the circulatory movements of exchange and contamination the two are now fated to replace each other again and again *ad nauseum* throughout eternity in Hell. This eternal revenge depicts the decomposition of the “*stummer Wiederholung allseitiger Umarmungen...*” at the conclusion of *Nathan der Weise* (140 [Lessing’s italics]). The settlement of identity that had been found in a family created by the moral economy has cracked under the mutations the emotional economy subjects the family to.

**Conclusion**

The introduction of the possibility of emotional contagion, its destructive implications to identity, and the deconstructive potential of the mistranslation of emotion evident in Kleist’s novella *Der Findling* shakes the stable structure of a moral economy as presented in Lessing’s drama *Nathan der Weise* to the core. The result is the deterioration of “der gute Alte” to the point
that all that remains of Nathan’s goodness in the Piachi’s character is only a misleading appearance. Nathan’s warning against abjection and imperative for affective openness within an economic system is pushed to its extreme. The family-grounding moral economy becomes a virulent emotional economy that devours the family. In this structure characters are better understood as signifiers, placeholders whose meaning depends on strategic position. This structure, though volatile, is still complete within itself, in that it finds conclusion – in opposition to the re-establishment of the family in Nathan – in the eternal breakdown of the family in Hell. This non-ending is, despite its instability, contained within the text itself. The reader is tasked with seeing beyond the narrator’s moral blinders and appreciating the characters in the context of their ever shifting roles and identities. That is to say, the reader remains relatively external to the text. Meaning, though not transparent to the reader, is still available to the careful reader within the text itself. In the coming chapter, Kleist’s unsettled but self-contained, volatile emotional economy mutates again to implicate the reader in Kafka’s unsettled semiotic economy.
CHAPTER 4

DAS URTEIL, KRAFT UND DIE URTEILSKRAFT

The Problematic of Reading in Kafka’s Das Urteil

In its trajectory from Lessing to Kleist, this research has dealt with the deconstruction of the logic of identity. In Nathan individual identity presupposes a kind of natural morality. The reprimand against idealistic abjection insinuates a zwischenmenschliche Verbindlichkeit at the base of the subject’s natural being. The educational aim of the drama is to elevate this natural aspect of being to conscious awareness. Kleist destabilizes the individuals in his story using emotional transference and its corruption through misinterpretation and thereby undermines the possibility of a natural self as it appears in Nathan. In the wake of Kleist’s deconstruction, all that is left of Lessing’s natural, teachable self is a vessel – an emotional container to be filled and emptied, and a placeholder for authority and identity, which can be moved around and exchanged. With the arrival of Kafka on the scene, even this last notion of the placeholder breaks down, as it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the places to be held. Whereas Kleist allows characters to challenge and occupy each other’s identities, Kafka makes the discourse of identity so entangled, one is at a loss of a means to ascribe anyone a role.

Die Rückkehr der Familie

Kafka’s writing demonstrates not only a tidal shift in writing and thinking in German cultural production, but also its effect on and by the development of certain types and tropes endemic to the literary canon in question. In particular this can be observed in Kafka’s handling of the “moralistic merchant and his adoptive children” types discussed in the prior chapters and evident in Das Urteil. This claim runs counter to many early critical views, which saw Kafka as standing completely outside the scope of prior influence. However, one must understand Kafka’s
work in its broader context\textsuperscript{13}. This includes, among other things, the influence of literary tradition. As early as in his first big literary success, *Das Urteil*, Kafka shows an intimacy with the established literary canon by playing with characters and themes evident in the previously analyzed works, reworking them into his modernist world and writing.

The character of the father of Georg Bendemann in *Das Urteil* carries a number of similarities to Nathan and Piachi. Not least of all, he too is an elderly businessman and father. Furthermore, one of his motivations as a character is his concern for a child, whom he feels is in need of instruction on the proper way to live and view the world; a child, who is in his opinion still too immature and egocentric. Consider his declaration to his son, Georg, at the end of story: “Jetzt weißt du also, was es noch außer dir gab, bisher wußtest du nur von dir! Ein unschuldiges Kind warst du ja eigentlich, aber noch eigentlicher warst du ein teuflischer Mensch!” (60). This statement recalls both Nathan’s reprimand of Recha for her egocentrically based “Schwärmerei” as well as Piachi’s disgust towards Nicolo’s “Bigotterie”. In an earlier threat launched at Georg, he reenacts, though in a somewhat reversed way, the *Inzestverbot* Nathan and Piachi place on their respective, adopted children (“Häng dich nur in deine Braut ein, und komm mir entgegen! Ich fege sie dir von der Seite weg, du weißt nicht wie”) (59). Apropos adoption, Georg’s father also seems to have partaken in a kind of spiritual adoption of Georg’s friend. He tells Georg, “Wohl kenne ich deinen Freund! Er wäre ein Sohn nach meinem Herzen”, and pushes the insinuation of an adoption of sorts further, exclaiming, “[M]it deinem Freund habe ich mich herrlich verbunden…” (56, 59). The doubtfulness of this claim proves especially important to understanding the way Kafka changes the game.

\textsuperscript{13} Mark M. Anderson in his book *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siecle* appeals for just such a reading of Kafka’s work (12).
Like Nicolo, Georg is considered by the father to be a kind of unjust usurper of the father’s life and livelihood. He has, according to the father, desecrated the memory of his deceased mother (“unserer Mutter Andenken geschändet”) so that he, Georg, “ohne Störung [s]ich befriedigen ka[n]n” (57). Although his sexual satisfaction is carried out on his fiancée and not the mother, this accusation against Georg nonetheless echoes Nicolo’s rape of Elvire. Where Lessing’s drama concludes with the (re)creation of a family and Kleist’s Erzählung with its dissolution, Kafka’s ends with the family’s envelopment into “ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr” (60). This will in the course of this chapter be shown to reference the unending problem of interpretation.

In concluding her analysis of Kleist’s “sleight of hand” tactics in the Der Findling, Marjorie Gelus hints at Kafka’s eventual adoption and augmentation of this sorcery to the degree that “the projected image is the only available reality then, and it is truly treacherous” (550). To adapt this statement to the present analysis, one can understand Kleist’s literary world as one without a grounding moral substance (earlier I used the metaphor of a “gold standard”), but still maintaining an internal cohesion through structural stability: The transference of emotional and power relations between Piachi, Nicolo and Colino make the individual characters isotopic, but the places they transiently occupy and the emotions which circulate among them provide a stable skeletal framework for the text nonetheless. In Kafka’s Das Urteil, however, the reader is left to his or her own devices to try to figure out how the seemingly scattered pieces of information ought to fit together. The arch from Lessing to Kleist to Kafka moves thus from a human truth internal to the character to be brought into and to ground discursive circulation in Lessing, to the loss of this truth in the triumph of discourse over identity in its endlessness in Kleist, and finally discourse’s endless overcoming of itself in Kafka.
“Bedeutungslose Vorfälle”

The story opens with the protagonist, Georg Bendemann, finishing a letter “an einen sich im Ausland befindlichen Jugendfreund” (47). What is interesting about this correspondence, is that on account of his uncertainty of how to present the truth of his present situation and his honest opinion of his friend’s life decisions to said friend without insulting him, “beschränkte sich George darauf, dem Freund immer nur bedeutungslose Vorfälle zu schreiben, wie sie sich, wenn man an einem ruhigen Sonntag nachdenkt, in der Erinnerung ungeordnet aufhäufen” (50).

Thus it comes that rather than writing to reveal something about his life and present state, George seeks in his writing to conceal something. And it is not as if he conceals, because he is compelled to write; Georg, if he were so inclined, could very well cut off contact with his friend in St. Petersburg, who, more likely than not, will never return to their mutual hometown, where Georg resides. For some reason Georg wants to write to his friend and yet hide away that part of his life about which one would be most inclined to write: his success in business and his engagement.

Georg finds himself thus in the midst of a paradoxical crisis: He wishes to maintain contact with his friend, and yet the act of communicating endangers itself. If communication is to function according to the traditional model of Sender-Message-Receiver, then it can only have a short lifespan. For, as the narrator makes clear, if Georg as sender communicates himself, that is his success in life, business, and marriage, to the friend, he runs the risk of insulting the friend and thereby potentially ending the friendship. This paradox is captured in the notion that to suggest to the friend that he come back and thereby emphasize Georg’s trustworthiness as friend “bedeutet aber nichts anderes, als daß man ihm gleichzeitig, je schonender desto kränkender,” considers him a failure, and would thus push the friend away (48). Thus the correspondence
between them can better be understood according to Luhmann’s model of communication as a self-perpetuating system existing for its own sake. Thus Georg’s own life, which purportedly forms the core of the communicative-instance of the letters (he is after all writing about his own life experiences), is actually its limit and must therefore be talked around. Georg’s letters then demonstrate a kind of “Kommunikationsvermeidungskommunikation.” In other words, the circulation of communication takes precedence over the material communicated, and by taking on a life of its own, it leaves the impression of a truth, the actuality of which however cannot and must not be contained within the medium.

A remarkable thing happens in this process: These uninteresting bits of useless information, one might say, the excess of Georg’s life, are imbued through the communicative exchange with a kind of cohesion and narrative quality. “So geschah es Georg, daß er dem Freund die Verlobung eines gleichgültigen Menschen mit einem ebenso gleichgültigen Mädchen dreimal in ziemlich auseinanderliegenden Briefen anzeigte, bis sich dann der Freund, ganz gegen Georgs Absicht, für diese Merkwürdigkeit zu interessieren begann” (50). By not talking about his own engagement, Georg maintains the possibility of communication. And yet in this very process of deploying random events in his letters he does in a deflected and accidental manner get on the topic of engagement: the self-destructive center of their correspondence. These “bedeutungslose Vorfälle,” which Georg deploys to avoid a particular narrative, take on the shape of a narrative that suggests the very thing it seeks to hide. This I will argue comprises the semiotic conditions of *Das Urteil*.

The paradoxical communicative crisis Georg finds himself in with his friend is reflective of the crisis of Kafka’s fiction. Characteristic of the “Kafkaesque” is the great difficulty, if not impossibility of summarizing. (*Der Prozess* is about someone called Josef K., who is on trial for
something, and thus has to somehow defend himself, which he fails at, but we do not really know why or how.) Kafka sets out to write a work of fiction and like any author is confronted with the question of how to create the impression of real events and characters; that is how to use description to relate something, which is not (or does not seem to be) reducible to its description. It is a question of verisimilitude and interpretation. Kafka’s solution: side-step the causal chain. In this process, however, the work metaphorically recalls this very evasive action that gives rise to its narrative possibility. Walter Benjamin sees a similar motif in ancient Greek tragedy. He states, “Der Gehalt der Heroenwerke [der griechischen Tragödie] gehört der Gemeinschaft wiedie Sprache. Da die Volksgemeinschaft ihn verleugnet, so bleibt er sprachlos im Helden” (111). Here however Kafka’s text is not concealing the end of the mythical age, but rather the possibility of a concealable message. This style of writing does however silently mark a shift away from meaning in cultural production.

“Das Urteil/ Eine Geschichte”

This technique of concealing the core of the text is evident in a number of Kafka’s works. At no point in Die Verwandlung does the reader ever discover the reason for Gregor Samsa’s transformation; he simply wakes up a bug one morning. The mystery behind Joseph K.’s supposed crime in Der Prozess works as the driving force moving the plot along, and yet it remains to the very end unsolved. Another K. in Das Schloss only seems to get further away from the truth, the harder he seeks it, just as the castle he tries to reach seems to always sink further into the distance, the more he approaches it. The real processes determining the events of the narration remain withheld from the reader. And yet, just as Georg’s friend takes an interest in this other engagement, a story arises nonetheless from the left-over excesses surrounding the unspeakable truth of the narrative, and this story is not unrelated to its unspeakable meaning.
This can be shown by comparing the combination of title, subtitle and dedication of the work in question with its conclusion.

“The Urteil/ Eine Geschichte/ Für F.” encapsulates the problematic of writing in Kafka’s work. The “Geschichte” is written with a very specific purpose in mind, namely to be read by someone. But unlike many other pieces of writing, literature and stories in general submit themselves to judgment and interpretation, both contained within the meaning of the word “Urteil.” Though this be its purpose, the interpretation cannot be mentioned in the story – there would be nothing left to interpret. Very few stories that end with “the moral of this story is…” are considered “literary” (unless perhaps the “moral” is ironic). Likewise the interpretation cannot be absent from the story – the interpretation could not be based on the reading. (For example, if Kafka himself were to claim that Das Urteil is actually a commentary on, say, the reproductive habits of penguins, that would be very hard to justify.) In the case of “das Urteil” in the sense of the word as “verdict,” the sentence passed on Georg by his father appears verbally in the “Geschichte,” – “Ich verurteile dich jetzt zum Tode des Ertrinkens!” – however, if it is actually carried out, remains hidden from the reader\(^\text{14}\) (60). We do not know how high the bridge is, how deep and wide the river, or Georg’s swimming capabilities. The reader is only allowed to glimpse up to the moment when Georg jumps from the bridge. What happens after that is lost in “ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr” (60). Georg very deliberately hides the outcome of his “sentence” by timing it with the overwhelming sound of an oncoming “Autoomnibus, der mit Leichtigkeit seinen Fall übertönen würde” (60). In this way the final judgment of Georg’s case (“Fall”) is lost in “unendlicher Verkehr,” which could be read in correspondence with the Briefverkehr between Georg and his friend. The correspondence with the unnamed “Freund”

\(^{14}\) For a lengthier extrapolation of the possibility of Georg surviving the jump at the end of the novella, see Volker Drüke’s article “Höchste Zeit für Georg Bendemann”.
casts reflection back on the “F.”, to whom both “Geschichte” and “Urteil” are dedicated. Hence the friend and “F.” become placeholders for the readership, as both are intended readers of texts. Moreover the texts to be read withhold a promised explanation. Georg reveals his engagement, but suspends a closer description of his fiancé to an unforeseen “Gelegenheit,” that is to some future correspondence (Verkehr) (51). In the same way, the suspension of the reader’s knowledge of the final “Urteil” in the final scene, enables the story’s continuation in the ongoing discussion (Verkehr) about the story. Thus the story fulfills its promise to the reader of an ongoing communication by evading the very thing to be communicated, “Das Urteil” and thereby becomes “Eine Geschichte.”

Alltagsverschwörung

Having sketched out the manner in which the story perpetuates itself by manner of its own suspension, the reader is left to pick through a great deal of excess, like trying to solve a mystery composed of red-herrings. In the space left behind by the missing judgment that would settle what the story is “about” and thereby allow the reader to differentiate between important details and extemporaneous description, the great mass of descriptive elements and “bedeutungslose Vorfälle” seem to conspire together in some murky cohesiveness, whose purpose and exact relation remains obtuse\(^\text{15}\). Take for example this line, from Kafka’s Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers:

Ich war doch eingeladen, ich hatte ihm gleich gesagt. Aber ich war eingeladen, hinaufzukommen, wo ich schon so gern gewesen wäre, und nicht hier unten vor dem Tor zu stehn und an den Ohren meines Gegenübers vorüberzuschauen. Und jetzt noch mit ihm stumm zu werden, als seien wir zu einem langen Aufenthalt auf diesen Fleck entschlossen. Dabei nahmen an diesem Schweigen gleich die Häuser rings herum Anteil, und das Dunkel über ihnen bis zu den Sternen. Und die Schritte unsichtbarer Spaziergänger, deren Wege zu erraten man nicht Lust

\(^{15}\) In analyzing Kafka’s In der Strafkolonie, Stanley Corngold emphasizes the importance of the seemingly unimportant and improper “Allotria.” According to Corngold, “‘[a]llotria’ is an otherness (allos: Greek for ‘other’) especially to its most schematic form, to pedantry” (69, [Corngold’s italics]).
Note the similarity of this description with the analysis of a suspended “Urteil” just made. A person is invited to a place he wants to be – like the interpretation a story promises, perhaps in its title – and yet he is withheld from this. A con man, not yet exposed, keeps him suspended on the threshold of where he wants to arrive at, and he manages this not through talking, but through the persuasiveness of his silence. By withholding his words and identity, he keeps the narrator stuck to the spot, caught up in confusion and curiosity. But this silence reaches poetic heights, seeming to bring the whole environment “bis zu den Sternen” in harmony with it; a harmony without end. Everything, every last bit of detail is woven into a story that is actually a con. In the same way, *Das Urteil* must be understood in the context of all that extra, superfluous detail, which *is* said in the context of a story, whose meaning cannot be said.

J.P. Stern comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the following section of Kafka’s infamous “Brief an den Vater”: “ich war sehr verzweifelt und alle meine schlimmen Erfahrungen auf allen Gebieten stimmten in solchen Augenblicken großartig zusammen” (Brief an den Vater, Kapitel 1). Stern remarks on how “there was something magnificent in that harmony of horrors” and concludes that it was exactly this “strange ‘congruence’ and harmony [Kafka] aimed at – again, at the greatest odds against achieving it that his powerful imagination could provide” (117). In his own reading of *Das Urteil* Stern attributes Kafka with the establishment of “a kind of spider’s web of insinuation by uniting the objective and subjective strands of guilt, so that we seem unable to distinguish between them…” and then reveals their incongruence (123). Although Stern argues that the apparent ambiguity is a trick, which can be
overcome, I see the text as presenting a special kind of ambiguity that invokes the reader to try to establish verisimilitude in its impossibility. My aim in the following paragraphs is to show that not only guilt, but the entirety of the story is caught up in a kind of insinuation, that on the one hand reveals itself as such, but on the other hand leaves no or little alternative other than to accept the insinuation despite its obviously constructed nature. The result upon the reader is reflective of the father’s command: apparently absurd and powerless, and yet, in the vacuum of any other commanding presence or clarity, seemingly all-powerful.

Though Stern sees the great conspiracy of various elements as the product of a mode of thinking, which combines feelings of guilt with guilt itself and impossible moral imperatives, I wish to put forth the argument, that what Stern observes is actually the effect of an erasure, which characterizes Kafka’s writing. I believe the suspension of an authority, of a Maßstab for judging goes a lot further to explain the story, its effect on the reader, its poetics, and it gives rise to the occasion that, to use Stern’s terms, objective and subjective guilt become intertwined.

Moreover this combination of a conspiracy of the mundane and a withdrawal of the possibility of judgment is articulated very neatly in another classically “Kafkaesque” moment in the first chapter of Der Prozess as K. is questioned in his own home. In the scene he is summoned into his neighbor’s, Fräulein Brüstner’s, room, a woman “mit der K. kaum mehr als die Grußworte gewechselt hatte” (266). Although it seems incredibly unlikely that this woman or her room could be of much interest to the investigation, aside from its momentary use as an interrogation room for K., several of the members of the so called “Untersuchungskomission” (K. himself is unsure how appropriate the term is) “sahen die Photographien des Fräulein Bürstner an” perhaps out of amusement, but perhaps as part of the investigation. This latter assumption is supported by the following description of the “Aufseher”: “[Der Aufseher]
verschob… mit beiden Händen die wenigen Gegenstände, die auf dem Nachttischchen lagen, die Kerze mit Zundhölzchen, ein Buch und ein Nadelkissen, als seien sie Gegenstände, die er zur Verhandlung benötige” (267). The critical element here is the subjunctive mood, which implies but does not assert a connection between these random objects and the case/investigation. One can either assume or reject the implication, but a certain reading is not possible without knowledge of the supposed crime, which of course remains concealed throughout the novel. The space left by this concealment first enables the possibility of bringing these diverse elements together and imbues them with a mysterious sense of importance. This restructuring of the focus, meaning and contingency of contextual elements is in the last instance a poetic feat and speaks to Kafka’s aesthetics and poetological process.

Peter Cersowsky also notices this feature in Kafka’s writing, which he refers to as “dekadenter Stil” (11). Cersowsky elucidates his understanding of the term “decadence” by citing Nietzsche’s reflections on it: “Das Wort wird souverän und springt aus dem Satz, der Satz greift über und verdunkelt die Seite, die Seite gewinnt Leben auf Unkosten des Ganzen – das Ganze ist kein Ganzes mehr. [...] Anarchie der Atome...“ (Nietzsche, Der Fall Wagner, 917). Essential for Cersowsky is that Kafka’s decadent writing style loses its sense of continuity and totallity by focusing on the particular, and this lends the writing a mysterious aura (“[Sein dekadenter Stil] wird durch die Fixierung auf das Detail, der der Überblick über das Ganze entgleitet, rätselvoll“) and that this mysterium can be understood in terms of a „Totalitätsverlust“ (11). My analysis departs from Cersowsky’s theory of decadence insofar as that the decadence, by which the detail overcomes the whole, is not so much the cause of a particular style, but rather an effect produced by the refusal to offer a key detail, which would organize the “decadent”
details into a narrative whole. Furthermore the play of the excessive details reenacts this very erasure.

**Eine Antwort ohne Frage**

Returning to *Das Urteil* one is then tasked with identifying what exactly is withheld. A clue is offered in the story’s pivotal moment, when the father transforms from a senile old man into a horrible tyrant and judge. Georg has just tucked his father into his own bed.

’Bin ich gut zugedeckt?’ fragte der Vater noch einmal und schien auf die Antwort besonders aufzupassen.
‘Sei nur ruhig, du bist gut zugedeckt.’
‘Nein!’ rief der Vater, daß die Antwort auf die Frage stieß… (56).

Thoughtful reading of the line, “daß die Antwort auf die Frage stieß”, begs the question, “which question?”/ Georg’s response to his father’s question is not another question, but an imperative followed by a declarative statement, “Sei nur ruhig, du bist gut zugedeckt”. The question, against which the father’s answer collides, also cannot be the father’s own question, “bin ich gut zugedeckt?”. Georg’s answer is too long; he would have not had time to say all that, had the father screamed “Nein!” immediately after asking the question. Furthermore, that the father “seemed pay special attention to the answer” after asking, implies that he first holds back and pauses to listen. Ergo, the father’s “Nein!” is the premature answer to an unasked question.

If nothing else, this puzzling and seemingly out of place phrase, placed right at the moment when the story itself becomes really puzzling and the characters’ behavior seems out of place, gives rise to a rethinking of the implications of the word “Antwort.” It harkens back to the letter Georg writes to the friend, ending with the question, “Wäre aber nicht gerade meine Hochzeit die richtige Gelegenheit, einmal alle Hindernisse über den Haufen zu werfen? Aber wie dies auch sein mag, handle ohne alle Rücksicht und nur nach Deiner Wohlmeinung” (51). The letter expects an answer, and more than that, an answer according to his “good judgement”
(“Wohlmeinung”) – an opinion, an “Urteil.” This is more or less a straightforward approach to question-answer communication. The father’s interjection into the cycle of communication, however, throws this whole structure off balance.

Before mailing the letter Georg tells his father, “Ich wollte dir nur sagen,… daß ich nun doch nach Petersburg meine Verlobung angezeigt habe” (52-53). This is clearly a statement, one that demands no response from the father at all. Yet the father turns this declarative statement around saying, “Georg… hör’ einmal! Du bist wegen dieser Sache zu mir gekommen, um dich mit mir zu beraten” (53). The father treats Georg’s statement as if it were a question, a plea for advice. This cannot be, especially since Georg’s statement is given in the past tense, literally meaning he has already sent the letter. This is not actually the case; thus the past tense implies so much as that the deed is as good as done, and Georg has fully made up his mind. The father thus raises questions where there are none; he undermines Georg by giving answers, where none are asked and thereby preempts the role of the friend, to whom any questions are actually directed.

“Hast du wirklich diesen Freund?“

Therein lies the concealment of the question the readers must ask themselves, without being able to satisfactorily answer. The father first appears powerless and senile, but then raises himself up, asserts his dominance, screaming “Nein!” and, after accusing his son of scheming against him, claiming that he and Georg’s friend have actually been conspiring against Georg for some time and his senility was only an act, the father lays down his final verdict, “Ich verurteile dich jetzt zum Tode des Ertrinkens” (60). A logical analysis of the situation leads the reader into an aporia. One of two things must be true: Either the father is telling the truth, and his dementia was only part of his grand plan; or the father’s erratic behavior in the latter half of the text is only an exhibition of his worsening dementia.
The first option is seemingly unsatisfying. Even in this angered, authoritarian mode, he still insists upon his love for his son – “Glaubst du, ich hätte dich nicht geliebt, ich, von dem du ausgingst?” (58). It thus seems highly unlikely that he would sentence his own beloved son to drown, and that he would conceive this huge scheme of revenge because of a slight misunderstanding, rather than at least attempting to talk once with his son about his grievances first. This kind of absurd brutality toward one’s own son, whom one supposedly loves, is not only indicative of, but is in itself insanity.

If the father is insane, then one still cannot feel much logical satisfaction with the outcome of events. After all, Georg ought to have surely recognized this as symptomatic of his father’s progressing dementia, and, though – as with any real person, who has experienced similar afflictions with dear family members – obviously hurt and troubled by his father’s behavior, should not have taken it so seriously. Certainly not to the point that he would carry out his father’s absurd verdict on himself to the point of suicide!

There remains but one figure who could perhaps clear up this logical impasse, and that is the friend. If he were given voice in the story, he could easily confirm or deny the father’s claim to have formed a mutual conspiracy with him. His presence is however permanently differed, the letter is never actually sent and the reader is left without his answer and the “Urteil” promised in Georg’s letter. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, the father has inserted himself into the position of the friend, putting the responsibility of the answering party upon himself, although no one has actually asked him anything. In other words, within the vacuum of an answer the father asserts himself as the authoritative party in establishing truth, and although his claim is as flimsy as his aging body, it holds since he hasinterrupted the potential for a counter-claim.
Die Beweislage

On grounds of this unchallenged – but nonetheless very questionable – authority, the father is able to conjure up “proofs” of his higher position and his long standing conspiracy, more or less out of thin air, just as K.’s Aufseher could summon matches and a pincushion as evidence for an unnamed crime, or the Bauernfänger could indite cosmic bodies in his silence. The lack of a means and measure for proofing enables the father to damn his son with this movement: “‘Glaubst du ich lese Zeitungen? Da!’ [sagte der Vater] und er warf Georg ein Zeitungsblatt, das irgendwie mit ins Bett getragen worden war, zu” (59). All that is said of this newspaper is that it is “[e]ine alte Zeitung, mit einem Georg schon ganz unbekannten Namen” (59). Under normal circumstances, this would hardly seem to mean, much less prove, anything. But the father throws it to the ground as if it were the final nail in Georg’s coffin, and by not responding, by not questioning the meaning behind the newspaper Georg seems to accept it as the damning piece of evidence the father claims it to be.

Under these conditions of unknowableness or suspended knowledge, Georg’s own assertions are turned against him. When the father yells that the friend knows “alles tausandmal besser!” Georg retorts, “‘Zehntausandmal!’… um den Vater zu verlachen, aber noch in seinem Munde bekam das Wort einen toternsten Klang” (59). This lies in the fact that Georg, unlike the father, cannot know with certainty if the father is lying or not, despite his likely well-grounded suspicions.

Georg is left only the following possibility: “alles vollkommen genau zu beobachten, damit er nicht irgendwie auf Umwegen, von hinten her, von oben herab überrascht werden könne” (58). And yet, how should he determine the “Umwege” from the right path, when the father holds all the cards regarding what may or may not be true about his relationship with the
friend? Georg was after all not completely honest with his friend, why should he assume his friend treated him any differently? Thus it lies in the father’s power to turn any discursive path into a potential “Umweg;” hence Georg’s paranoid worry that a surprise, a conversational booby trap could lurk anywhere. And in context of the overwhelming nature of this task, which suspended insight presents to Georg, we read, “Jetzt erinnerte er sich wieder an den längst vergessenen Entschluß[, alles genau zu beobachten,] und vergaß ihn, wie man einen kurzen Faden durch ein Nadelöhr zieht” (58). A few paragraphs later, Georg’s memory comes again to the fore.

In the course of his accusations against Georg, the father asserts, “[M]it deinem Freund habe ich mich herrlich verbunden, deine Kundschaft habe ich hier in der Tasche!” (59). The father is however wearing a nightshirt. The idea that he could have a hidden pocket in his nightgown, would present him like a kind of magician or illusionist with secret compartments that aid him in in the illusion of appearing to have control over the secret workings of the universe. This is then confirmed in the above-analyzed scene, where the father summons up a newspaper seemingly out of nowhere and declares it to be irrefutable evidence of his power over Georg. Georg considers dispelling this trick: “‘Sogar im Hemd hat er Taschen!’ sagte sich Georg und glaubte, er könne ihn mit dieser Bemerkung in der ganzen Welt unmöglich machen. Nur einen Augenblick dachte er das, denn immerfort vergaß er alles” (59). This and the prior instance of remembering and then immediately forgetting play off the father’s senility.

Recall that in the scene in the father’s room, where Georg is presented as the successful businessman and his father, the rumpled, senile old man in need of caretaking, the father admits, “Im Geschäft entgeht mir manches, es wird mir vielleicht nicht verborgen – ich will jetzt gar nicht die Annahme machen, daß es mir verborgen wird –, ich bin nicht mehr kräftig genug, mein
Gedächtnis läßt nach. Ich habe nicht mehr den Blick für alle die vielen Sachen” (54). As mentioned, once the father stands up on Georg’s bed, the tables turn and power changes hands. The old man’s senility is converted into Georg’s memory loss. Secondly, just as the father has lost “den Blick für alle die vielen Sachen”, Georg is no longer able to maintain a holistic and stable view of what happens around him, and gets caught up in all the possible “Umwege.”

The possession of power must then be tied to the claim to knowledge, and this claim enables its possessor to assemble the particulars of the surrounding world to come to his aid in the assertion of “truth.” This power of conspiring with “bedeutungslose Vorfälle” extends across time, granting the possessor the authority of memory, of binding past to present into a consistent narrative, whose truth is ultimately the authority of the possessor. In the first part of the story, this power enables Georg to narrate his truth onto the identity of the friend – “mein Freund hat seine Eigentümlichkeiten” – and even to speak the father’s Urteil on the friend for him, when he says to his father, “Ich erinnere mich noch, daß du [meinen Freund] nicht besonders gern hattest” (55). By placing this very friend, his opinion of him and the friend’s relationship to both characters in question, Georg’s father undermines Georg’s claim to truth and memory.

Whether or not the father is telling the truth is, in a certain sense, irrelevant. What matters is the uncertainty that grants the father the Überzeugungskraft he needs to appear all-knowing, depicted in the sentence, “Er stahlte vor Einsicht” (57). What is important then is not if he actually has insight, but that he is able to produce and radiate the most convincing effect in a situation where truth cannot be proven. In this way he then wins back his Urteilskraft from his “usurping” son. This claim to truth can be understood as similar to the authoritative claim invested in Elvire in Der Findling, in which characters achieved identity in relation to Elvire. Whereas Elvire was at least somewhat stable, in that she was a diegetically real person present
in the narrative, and thus a claim on her could be carried out with a degree of certainty, due to the absence of the friend the power of the claim in Das Urteil rests solely on the uncertainty of its object, particularly in relation to the other claimant

Das Urteil wird gefällt/ Der Verurteilte fällt/ Ein Urteil fehlt

The relationship between father and son functions as a kind of self-reflexive performance of the semiotic relationship between text and reader. In the first portion of the story, when Georg composes the letter to his friend, he spends a considerable amount of time speculating and trying to put himself into the friend’s shoes. He defends his decision to write to him, stating, “Wenn er mein guter Freund ist, sagte ich mir, dann ist meine glückliche Verlobung auch für ihn ein Glück“ (53). In other words, he believes himself capable of drawing logical conclusions based on an interpretation of the situation, in essence a form of reading which aligns him with the reader. He does the same thing in his father’s room, concluding that the dim lighting and dank air in the room are the causes for the father’s apparent poor health (54). Up to this point the reader (assuming he or she is reading the story for the first time) may feel just as confident in his or her ability to grasp the situation at hand. It happens then, that by putting Georg’s understanding of the situation into doubt, the father also challenges the interpretive ability of the reader. Both reader and Georg are at a loss to conclusively provide an explanation of events. To put it another way, the father has also robbed the reader of his or her Urteilskraft so that he or she too, like Georg, must accept his Urteil, despite its absurdity. By withholding the actual scene of its fulfillment, the reader regains the opportunity to judge, but only in the “endloser Verkehr” of speculation.

16 Tim Mehigan also recognizes the crises of meaning and interpretation in Kafka’s work as part of Kleist’s influence on Kafka. He writes “Kafka’s failure to temper the loss of received inferential contexts by developing workable replacement contexts can be seen as one of the main results arising from his reading of Kleist” (196).
The self-reflexivity of the father-son/reader-text relationship becomes apparent, when one considers the role of the narrator. With Kleist’s novella I discussed the role of the unreliable narrator as a misleading figure – one who, as it were, tries to drive the reader onto “Umwege.” In *Das Urteil* the narrator is much less judgmental. Instead, as in Georg’s letters, the narrator provides the readers with a mass of “bedeutungslose Vorfälle” and leaves the reader up to his or her own devices as to how these out to fight together. At first the narrators intimate description of Georg’s thoughts, provides the reader with a stable framework: The narrator may not be making constructive judgments, but George sure is, analyzing and scrutinizing every detail of his relationship to his friend and his father. The reader is thus offered a momentary frame of reference through Georg, but when the father calls Georg’s *Urteilskraft* into question that frame is removed, and without a narrative interjection and explanation, the reader is called to draw conclusions out of the text, but is denied a means for doing so with any degree of certainty.

**Ein Leser: in den Text geboren**

Through this unsettling of certainty in reading, the reader becomes *angesteckt* by the intrigue of the narrative and thereby inscribed into its semiotic economy. In Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* a self-sufficient moral economy is presented to the reader/viewer, who is tasked with comprehending its didactic imperatives and, hopefully, putting them into action outside of the text. Kleist places his characters into a much less stable emotional economy, and challenges the reader to see through the façade of a reliable moral economy, to account for the characters actions. He concludes his novella, by bringing the family system into an eternal state of decay and thereby establishes the emotional economy with all of its violent eruptions as fully encapsulated in the text itself. Kleist thereby invites the reader to study this system as an outside observer. Kafka’s novella also ends with endliness, however, as the above analysis shows, the
reader’s speculation is demanded. The reader becomes part of the “endloser Verkehr” of speculation that he or she must continue to bring back into the text, long after having finished reading. The withheld “Urteil” must (but cannot) be supplied by the reader. This final and yet unsettled verdict by the reader touches on the moral and affective aspects of the text, which formed the playing field of Lessing and Kleist’s economic structures respectively. By trying to make sense of the sequence of events (What is the relation of the father to the friend?) one implicitly passes judgments on the characters, depending on how one decides to interpret the text, and thereby makes a moral judgment. In morally judging Georg and his father (Who is guilty? Is the father’s verdict justified or justifiable?), one inevitably takes sides, and not just rationally, but also emotionally. One may feel sorry for Georg, anger towards the father, or the reverse; or one could have a whole number of emotional responses ranging from outrage to relief to satisfaction, depending on how one conceives of Georg’s fate after jumping from the bridge. Lessing and Kleist’s economies are made inconclusive within the framework of Kafka’s semiotic economy, which claims the reader and, by means of erasure, does not let go.

It is tempting to see Georg Bendemann’s character as a reflection of Kafka himself, and I do not wish to argue against the numerous biographical interpretations of Das Urteil, which make just such a case. But within the semiotic order, it is the father who comes across as carrying the creative and determining authority of the author. As discussed in the preceding subsection, Georg’s struggle to maintain interpretive power over the situation he faces resembles the reader’s receding capability of accounting for the events in the text as the father rises to power. In effect, Georg’s existential crisis with his father becomes our crisis as readers with the text, and by extension with Kafka.
Just as the father’s role in the novella creates the blind spots in the narrative that lead to the logical impasses, which initiate the reader into the text’s semiotic economy, so too does the father’s role in the business – one jointly run by Georg and his father, i.e. comprised of reader and text – reveal an uncertainty. In the same speech, in which he asks Georg if he really has a friend in St. Petersburg and thereby troubles the waters of interpretation, Georg’s father tells his son, “Ich will nicht Dinge aufrühren, die nicht hierher gehören. Seit dem Tod unserer... Mutter sind gewisse unschöne Dinge vorgegangen. Vielleicht kommt auch für sie Zeit und vielleicht kommt sie früher, als wir denken. Im Geschäft entgeht mir manches, es wird mir vielleicht nicht verborgen – ich will jetzt gar nicht die Annahme machen, daß es mir verborgen wird…” (53-54). Several things about this explanation relate directly to the interpretive challenges the father places on the reader.

Recall that it was the wife and mother, who acted as guarantor in Kleist’s emotional economy. Her absence in Das Urteil parallels the disappearance of a textual integrity that would allow the text to be understood on its own terms – that is, without recourse to unsubstantiable assumptions on the part of the reader. Consequently, the father is not entirely aware of what goes on in his own business and cannot and furthermore will not attempt to explain what escapes his comprehension or why. In the same way, the text does not attempt to justify its gaps. With Kleist the narrator provided misleading assumptions and conclusions, but with Kafka any such conclusion is indefinitely deferred to a reader, who, like Georg, lacks the means to provide a satisfactory explanation.

In this manner the father, as text, reprimands not only Georg, but also us, when he scolds, “Jetzt weißt du also, was es noch außer dir gab, bisher wußtest du nur von dir!” (60). Put in terms of the relationship between reader and text: that which “exists outside of us” as readers, is that
aspect of the text, which we cannot take ownership of through our explanations: its secrets. We cannot know who the friend really is; we cannot explain what the text answers, since we do not know the question. Therefore we are also “condemned to death by drowning” in a text that demands explanation, but does not provide a solid basis to “ground” one. The reader must jump into a “geradezu unendlicher Verkehr” of exchange in the semiotic economy with the text.

Conclusion

The destabilization of Lessing’s moral economy, which Kleist’s emotional economy began, finds its conclusion in Kafka’s semiotic economy. By structuring the text around an unidentifiable secret, Kafka creates with Das Urteil a narrative that implicates the reader in its very structure. The reader is both tasked with providing meaning to the text, and denied the possibility of meeting this challenge. Not only does this function as the framework of the possibility of the text, it is also reflected in the text itself, as Georg’s struggle with his father illustrates the reader’s own struggle with the text. Like the endlessly unsettled conclusion of Der Findling, Kafka’s novella also has an open ending with the promise of endless exchanges, with the caveat that the reader gets initiated into the ongoing exchange and negotiation of meaning within the story.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study of motifs demonstrates the intricate connections between literature, economics, familial relations and theories of the self and the other. Much in accordance with psychoanalytic theories, the works examined have emphasized the family as Schauplatz for the emersion of the self. In contrast the market signifies the self’s immersion into discourse with the other. In all of the texts looked at in the scope of this thesis, the boundaries distinguishing these two spheres have been shaky at best and serve more to demonstrate the interrelatedness of these two worlds, much like Kristeva’s theories on the abject reflect upon the complex and always uncertain difference between self and other. In each case this ambivalence centers on the idea of adoption.

In each of these stories, a specific medium is employed to account for this ambivalence, each time with important consequences for the adoption metaphor. Thus it is no coincidence that in Nathan der Weise, where morality is deployed as the mediating field for the abject, that Nathan adopts Recha out of humbleness before God, or that the series of events that bring the family together in the final scene are all preconditioned by good works.

Since Kleist’s Der Findling explores this relation to the abject as mediated by emotional contagion, one should not be surprised that the series of exchanges and replacements that abound in the text all invoke strong outbursts of emotion and often directly or indirectly depict disease-related themes. By removing the transcendental element implicit in an Aufklärungs morality, the relation of self to abject remains permanently unsettled: hence the displacement of the story’s conclusion to the fires of Hell.

In Kafka’s Das Urteil, the real relation between the self and other remain permanently
withheld from the reader. The father’s “adoption” of the friend is never satisfactorily confirmed, and this conditions the advent of the reader’s participation in a semiotic economy, which like Kleist’s emotional economy is also endless, yet like Lessing’s moral economy engages its reader. Although this time, it is not the reader’s job to live out text’s lesson, but rather to try to bring one into the text. The mediums of morality and affect have been effaced by the medium, which mediated them: literature.

The display of these various mediums greatly influences the role of the narrative presence. As noted in chapter two, Lessing’s theory on gesture sought the outward expression of an inner moral. Thus the moral economy and its conditions rely on demonstration rather than narration, thereby highlighting the need for a dramatic format that does not make use of a narrator. Kleist’s emotional economy in contrast is based largely on misunderstanding, false assumptions and affective persuasion. It is no wonder then that such a story would be told by an unreliable narrator, who, by deploying the very logic of the moral economy, misleads the reader into morally unsettling bling-alleys. In Kafka a narrator is again present, but rather than being unreliable, Kafka’s narrator seems too removed and objective. Like with Lessing the reader is tasked with uncovering the meaning of the text, and not, as with Kleist, mislead. And yet the text resists interpretation; the narrator leaves holes in the logic of the narrative, which simply cannot be satisfactorily filled.

Finally, another reoccurring theme is that of the secret. In Nathan the secret of the one true religion is resolved by finding the right approach to the question. The truly good person casts their gaze away from the theoretical God, and focuses on the good works to be fulfilled in God’s world. Der Findling, whose mystery resolves around Elvire’s true feelings, likewise makes its solution a matter of the correct reading. In contrast, however, the characters constantly
misread each other, and even the narrator, by insisting on a certain moral perspective, can
mislead one to a misinformed and self-contradictory reading. With Das Urteil, however, a
“proper” reading becomes impossible, because the mystery of the friend’s association with the
father remains unsettled. Lessing’s call to action is taken back up and likewise made impossible.
The text is no longer the solution to a mystery or the positing of a riddle, but the performance of
the narrative-producing mystification process.
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Academic History

Graduate MA in German Studies at Florida State University:

Studied Literaturwissenschaft in Germanistik at the master’s level at the Julius-Maximillians Universität Würzburg in Würzburg, Germany during a yearlong exchange program through the Verband der Deutsch- Amerikanischen Clubs, 2013-2014.

Taught German 1, 2, and 3 at Florida State University as a teaching assistant, 2012-present.

Accepted into the Florida State University master’s program in German studies with teaching-assistantship, 2012.

Undergraduate BA in German and Creative Writing with honors in the major at Florida State University:

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Completed honors in the major thesis project in poetry: “Prayers to Ex-Girlfriends/Conversations with Gods” under direction of Dr. Kirby in 2012.

Intern for the FSU German Department: Worked with Herr Hattaway in spring of 2011 organizing Stammtisch and assisting at the German School of Tallahassee

Accepted into Florida State University bachelor’s program. 2008.

High School Diploma from Titusville High School

Member of National Honors Society.

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Worked backstage with the English Drama Group at the Uni Würzburg in Germany, 2013-2014.

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Recipient of Winthrop King modern languages teaching stipend 2012.

Member of Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society, 2012-present.
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Member of FSU German Club, 2011-present.

Presented research on the international court system at conference for Balkan relations in Dubrovnik, Croatia summer of 2009.

Read applications for Social Justice Leaving Learning Community candidates and conducted phone interviews of finalists in 2009.


Helped build a house for the Fuller Center and Habitat for Humanity 2008,

Member of the Social Justice Living-Learning Community since Fall, 2008.

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