

The Deadly Gaze:

Penthesilea and Achilles in Love

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Kleist's drama *Penthesilea* is predicated on the Greek Epic Cycle and especially on Homer's *Iliad*—a story which originates in the illicit desire of Paris for Helen of Troy.¹ Their love and Helen's subsequent abduction is the direct cause of the war between the Trojans and the Greeks. The story of this epic struggle begins with the foundational act of romantic yearning, a desire which has dire consequences for the very existence of the state. Kleist's play *Penthesilea* takes us into the very center of this battle. At the beginning of the play, we encounter Achilles and the Greeks threatened by Trojan forces, who are subsequently routed by the army of Amazons led by the warrior queen Penthesilea. But while the Greeks welcome the help of the Amazons, their inexplicable alliance with the Greeks rather than the Trojans already signals the dramatic center of the drama: the deadly love between Achilles and Penthesilea. But while Kleist's story of two star-crossed lovers, Achilles and Penthesilea, begins where the *Iliad* stops, it also reverses the logic of desire.² In the *Iliad*, the Greeks seek justice for Paris' crime of desire – his abduction of Helen. The focus here is the actions of Greek heroes fighting on behalf of the state. In *Penthesilea*, on the other hand, Achilles, the greatest hero of the Greeks, engages in battle in order to win Penthesilea for himself. Penthesilea mirrors the actions of Achilles in fighting to win him. Kleist has thus reversed the trajectory of war from restoration to the destruction of the state. Achilles and Penthesilea become for each other what Helen of Troy had been for Paris – an illicit prize, someone to be won in the battle for love.

What does Kleist accomplish in this reversal of the narrative trajectory of the story of the *Iliad*, a legend which incorporates the epic struggle of the Greek heroes for victory over the Trojans? In the epic tradition following the *Iliad*, Achilles kills Penthesilea on the field of battle. But in Kleist's play, it is

33

Penthesilea who kills Achilles in the brutal battle for his heart. This chiasmic reversal reveals a powerful and indeed shocking turn of events. In stories of the Greek epic tradition, Achilles, after he killed Penthesilea, had honored her body in death. But in Kleist's play, Achilles, the greatest of Greek heroes, blessed with invincibility in battle by his mother the goddess Thetis, dies a brutal death at the hand of Penthesilea. And instead of honoring the dead Greek hero, Penthesilea viscously attacks the body and tears it limb from limb. What does this reversal of fortunes which culminates in the ignoble death of Achilles reveal about the encounter with the beloved – that is, the process of falling in love? In both the *Iliad* and in *Penthesilea* we know it is a deadly game, a serious game fought in epic battles for honor, control, power, and glory. The condition of falling –

falling into the state of romantic love – has had a profound impact not only on the individuals involved but has had repercussions for the very existence of the state.

In this paper, I wish to examine the encounter of the two warriors of Kleist's play, Achilles and Penthesilea, with the state of fatal state of romantic love from the point of view of the Lacanian gaze. Lacan's understanding of the function of the gaze in the construction of the subject illuminates the deadly trajectory of romantic love. Because Kleist's play not only narrates the encounter of the lovers in terms of their psychological state of mind, but also in terms of the breakdown of social order, the play has already lent itself to a number of psychoanalytical interpretations.³ Particularly noteworthy are the readings by Helga Gallas, and Cullens and Mücke. Gallas analyzes Penthesilea's desire in terms of Lacan's discourse structure, and Cullens and Mücke focus on the subject in language. My own analysis of *Penthesilea* will elucidate the role of the Lacanian gaze in this war of the roses. I argue in this paper that the nature of the desire which consumes the lovers can best be understood through an examination of the construction of the subject in love as a part of the process of specular identifications made manifest in Lacan's writings on the gaze.

While much has been written on the Lacanian gaze, especially in the field of visual culture, it is a concept which

34

is often misunderstood. Lacan's writing about the gaze is to be found primarily in his *Four Fundamental Concepts, Écrit and Ethics of Psychoanalysis, On Feminine Sexuality (XX), Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954, and On Painting*.⁴ This inclusion of the gaze in these works does not make it easier to come up with a definition of what this gaze is and what it does. Yet the fact that Lacan discusses the gaze in so many works points to the gaze as central to all levels of Lacanian thought. In this paper, my goals are twofold: to illustrate certain aspects of Lacan's concept of the gaze and its function in the construction of the subject; and thus to come to a better understanding of the motivations which define the act of falling in love and its consequences for the individual and for society in Kleist's drama. The play focuses on the visual aspects of perception on a variety of levels. The narrators who move the action of the play are really observers and the play's protagonists engage with each other from the vantage point of how they see one another and are seen by each other. In other words, who they are is at all times circumscribed by the scopic register.

For Lacan the function of the gaze is critical to the condition of and for the existence of the subject, a subject whose desire is the desire of the Other. This otherness at the very heart of desire defines the unconscious, which is the place where desire originates, as radically outside the subject and not accessible to conscious control. Because the subject is from its birth a split subject, alienated from the real of the body, it is forced to construct a gestalt, a semblance of being in order to be realized as a subject of social and individual identification. This subject is at the mercy of forces which are accessible in dreams, slips of the tongue and indeed in the very processes of creative and artistic endeavors. Lacan defines and re-defines the gaze as having a critical function at every level of the development of the subject. Because the unconscious is constructed by forces outside the subject, that is, the encounter of the subject with language, by law and

by the desire of desiring others, the gaze unlike the other part objects always operates at the intersection of all three registers of psychic construction – the real of the body, the imaginary and the symbolic. The Lacanian gaze, which has

35

often been reduced to Lacan's mirror stage, is not to be found in the reflection of the subject in the mirror, but it comes from a place, from which the subject cannot see (or at least cannot will himself to see) the unconscious drives which constitute the subject in all its complex particularities.⁵

Carol Jacob's, in her narrative analysis of Kleist's *Penthesilea*, notes that the Greeks and the Amazons share a parallel retelling of the story of the epic battles which Achilles and Penthesilea wage with each other. This re-telling is really reportage describing what each side sees. Greeks and Amazons function as observers of these events.⁶ The battle is first described by the Greeks, Odysseus, Antilochus and others, as they watch the Amazons attack the Greek army. At first, the watchers are not sure what these women want. Like Freud, they are in fact in the dark about this. Are the Amazons going to join the Trojans against the Greeks or are they going to come to their side? The Greek observers are confused by the actions of the warrior princess, who, instead of letting Achilles be killed, slays his Trojan attacker. This reportage is interesting from a variety of perspectives. As the battle unfolds, we hear the reports from a number of different positions. If we had a split screen we could imagine a number of cameras taking pictures simultaneously of the same scene and this might provide a closer approximation of Kleist's narrative technique. The emphasis here is on the many eyes which together and separately capture the actions of Achilles and Penthesilea and reposition our protagonists with each telling. Like the reportage of the Greeks, the Amazon warriors serve this same specular function, positioning Penthesilea in her battle with Achilles, seeing her as she cannot in fact see herself.

Carol Jacob notes the Greeks operate on a realm of "a telling that bespeaks all the control of conventional rhetoric."⁷ I think that while the linguistic devices and in fact the flow of language indicates that language is under the control of these "outside" reporters, this parallel narration from the vantage point of Greeks and Amazons shows more importantly the specular relations which inform the place from which Achilles and Penthesilea are seen, indeed reified

36

by the watchers. The subjects of this speech, described by the observers of both sides, are captured in their gaze. Indeed specular events are critical in understanding the trajectory of the lovers falling into love, madness and into death. While the lovers are watched from all sides, something represented by the teichoscopic narrative construction of the play, the lovers only have eyes for each other. This difference between the gazes of the watchers and the eyes of the lovers is important to understanding the function of the gaze in relation to the eye. When Penthesilea picks out Achilles in the first battle of the play, her look is equivalent to her deadly arrow. This look from the beginning is completely proprietary. Penthesilea prevents Deiphobus, the son of the Trojan king Priam, from harming Achilles because it is only she who has that privilege. She repeats this proprietary action when she forbids the Amazons from killing Achilles. Only she has

the right to hurt him. It is also noteworthy that Achilles is no longer invincible as soon as he is the object of Penthesilea's "eye/arrow". He sustains a wound, when in fact we know that according to legend his only vulnerable point is the ankle from which his mother held him and immersed him in the protective magical waters. The look of love, it seems, has already pierced his armor. This consuming look is also deadly for Penthesilea. It causes her to lose control of her senses. She cannot hear what others are saying. And as she refuses to listen, she takes incredible risks with herself as well as with her army. She literally comes apart. Achilles echoes these same reactions. Upon his safe return from the battle with Penthesilea, Achilles seems no longer to hear or understand what is being said to him. Odysseus, the rational Greek, whose advice and judgment surely speak for the collective state, tries to shake Achilles out of his dumb stupor:

Odysseus: Pelides did you hear the advice we have given?

Achilles: Words for me? No nothing. What was it? What is do you want from me? (Il.563-566)

Odysseus gives Achilles the order of Agamemnon to return to the Greek camp. But Achilles in the thrall of his encounter with

37

Penthesilea refuses to obey. This refusal indicates the desire for private pleasure which now consumes him. Penthesilea is his only desire. The collective interest of the state be damned. He states he will not return to Troy:

Until I have made her my bride,

And she, her forehead crowned with mortal wounds.

can follow me through the streets feet-first. (Il. 612-615)⁸

Kleist's play has in its sight-lines the very essence of romantic love. The dying, the yearning, melting and coming apart are expressions of love especially connected to 19th century Romantic notions of love. But while the look of love reveals the vulnerable and wounded lover, it is also predicated on the idea that these two lovers find in each other a level of perfection. This idea of becoming whole, of finding in the beloved the missing part of ourselves, can be traced in the Western tradition to the Greeks. Plato in the *Symposium* has Aristophanes articulate the myth of sexual complementarity, that is, that for each man there is a perfect woman and vice versa. These two halves complete each other – together each makes up a perfect whole. By putting this myth in the mouth of Aristophanes, Plato also indicates that there is a joke here somewhere. Lacan draws upon this myth and in fact its humorous elements to explain the libido, something which is critical to understanding the function of the gaze in psychic structure. Lacan says that "we can apprehend the privilege of the gaze in the function of desire, by pouring ourselves, as it were, along the veins through which the domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire." (Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: 85) His discussion of Plato's myth of sexual complementarity provides us with an opportunity to follow this path.

Whenever the membrane of the egg in which the fetus emerges on its way to becoming new born are broken, imagine for a moment that something flies off...namely the *homelette*, or the lamella. . . This lamella, this

38

organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ— [. . .] is the libido. [. . .] It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexual reproduction. And it is of this that all the forms of the *object a* that can be enumerated [eye, gaze, breast, feces, voice, (my examples)] are the representatives, the equivalents. (Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*: 197-198)

The condition of the subject is such that at birth there is a split – a satisfaction which is dependent on the Other. Yet it is a satisfaction which can never be fulfilled in the Other. This idea of the *lamella* represents Lacan’s attempt to place this alienating relation to the Other in the field of desire. The myth of sexual union here does not engender perfection or completeness but exactly the opposite. It gives a name to that which is lost in that process. According to Lacan, it explains “the relation between the living subject and that which he loses by having to pass, for his reproduction, though the sexual cycle.” (Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*: 199)

The *lamella*, this organ of desire, represents something which was once was a part of the being and is chopped off, like the breast, voice and gaze of the mother. This mysterious something which is lost is manifested in the look of love. In Kleist, the wound inflicted on Achilles and the blows which stun Penthesilea represent not only the power of the libidinal drive, but also the wounds which are inflicted through the look of love. For Lacan, the *lamella* demonstrates how this look functions in the scopical register. The look of the lovers is connected to the most primitive *Urbild* which the image of the beloved reflects back to the lover.

From the very beginning of the play we see the dialectic between the eye and the gaze in the interaction between Achilles and Penthesilea. While both lovers find an ideal image of the beloved in the other, this image is constantly shown by Kleist to be false. And this imaginary ideal is at the heart of mis-steps which ultimately lead to a perpetual “missing”, that is, neither lover really “sees the other” as they are, nor is such a

39

thing possible. Each one shows the other an image that the other does not want to see. This war of desire is fought at the most primitive register, a place which is really devoid of language and law. This is why each of the lovers cannot hear the words which the reasoned voices of their clans utter. Achilles must disobey Odysseus and Penthesilea the authority of the high-priestess of the Amazons. This refusal of the law connects their actions to the zone of death. This relation to the Other, that is in this case represented by rational language of Odysseus and the high-priestess, indicates the denial of the power of the signifier which is operative in the look of love.

The relation of the Other is precisely that which, for me brings out what is represented by the lamella – not sexed polarity, the relation between masculine

and feminine--, but the relation between the living subject and that which he loses by having to pass, for his reproduction, through the sexual cycle. In this way I explain the essential affinity of every drive with the zone of death, and reconcile the two drives – which, at one and the same time, makes present sexuality in the unconscious and represents, in its essence, death.

(Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p.199)

The *lamella* represents or brings out this relation to the Other. It illustrates the connection to the scopic drive and the primitive *Urbild* or fundamental fantasy which is realized in the image of the beloved. Caught in the gaze of the Other, that is not the physical image of the other but that image which each seeks in the other, both lovers are doomed to search for that ideal in the image of the beloved. This process involves the eye, which is connected to the voracity of battle and thus in the annihilation of the other and the gaze through which the desire of the Other operates. There is a fundamental split here between the eye and the gaze. The look of love is driven by the alienating gaze of the unconscious but is not equivalent to the eye of the lover. There are numerous examples of the look of love in Achilles and Penthesilea, something which the literature on this play has duly noted. But while the look aims to capture

40

the other, the other is shown grasped not by the image of the other but by the lure, the *fascinum* of the Other. When talking about her fascination with Achilles, Penthesilea is describing a state of which existed before she got her first glimpse of Achilles in battle. “My only thought” she says, “when I woke, my eternal dream was of you! The whole world laid spread out before me like a patterned web; and each stitch, wide and full, held one of your deeds, and in my heart, pure white like silk, with colors of flame I burned them forever in. Soon I saw you.” (Il. 2187-2194)

Achilles appears to Penthesilea like “the sun shining amidst the dim stars.” (Il. 2215) He is like a mirror, but in this mirror the image of the other breaks up and cannot be fully grasped. Penthesilea knew she had fallen in love the moment she saw Achilles on the battlefield. Blinded by his sun-like image, only two choices seemed possible: to win him for herself, or to die. (I.2220) Achilles’ image is like a diamond. This jewel in its many facets blinds and does not reflect back one image but fills the eye with its many-faceted reflections. Achilles in his turn uses this metaphor of reflection to describe the image of Penthesilea. He doesn’t need his eyes to see. Her image, he tells her, is fixed in his mind’s eye as firmly as a diamond. (Il.1822-1824)

This jewel-like effect, that is, the *fascinum* of the gaze, contains the mystery of their desire, for here the attraction of the other is revealed as something connected to the unconscious. The unconscious is the real locus of the gaze and the eye the mechanism of deception. For Lacan the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see is a lure. The subject is presented as other than he/she is to another subject, and what each gives the other to see is not what he/she wishes to see. In this way the eye may function as the *object a*, that is to say at the level of lack.

For Penthesilea, the myth of Achilles, that is, the fascinating effects of his story, came to her through the desire of the Other. She internalizes the command of her dying

mother, Otere, to make Achilles, the great hero of the Greeks, her mate; and this becomes the fundamental fantasy of her desire. The

41

words of the mother surely represent literally that the desire of the Other is the locus of Penthesilea's unconscious desire. This naming of Achilles and Penthesilea's act of defiant acceptance of her mother's directive constitute her great crime against the Amazon law.⁹ Penthesilea tells Achilles that Amazon law prescribes that the women go into battle to find their mate, but are prohibited from looking for him. "It is not allowed, that a daughter of Mars should seek her opponent, she should choose the one, whom her god has let her see in battle." (ll. 2145-2147). Penthesilea explains that this law which initiates the dance of love has its origins in the prescriptive law of the Amazonian primal mother: "Oh son of Thetis, the words of the first mothers decided it thus, And we are silenced, [we obey] as you do the words of the first fathers." (ll. 1909-1911) Moreover, the originative queen Tanais had decreed that men are prohibited from looking and seeing. "The man," explains Penthesilea to Achilles, "whose eyes see this state, will close his eyes forever" (ll. 1963-1964) For both lovers this transgressive seeing and desiring can only end in annihilation.

Goethe's response to Kleist's play is cruel and at the same time revelatory. Goethe says he found the play to be impossible. It doesn't work on the stage, he scoffed, and affords its public too few rewards. He states, moreover, that Penthesilea, in the words of the writer Johann Daniel Falk (1786-1826) "borders in a few places on the highly comic."¹⁰ Kleist's play presents a struggle which culminates with the horrific scene of the great hero Achilles devoured and torn apart by his bride at the very moment when he thinks that he has grasped what she wants from him. Why does Goethe find humor in this battle of the sexes? An answer to this may be found in Goethe's own, albeit comic treatment of the theme of narcissistic love in his autobiography, *Dichtung and Wahrheit*.¹¹ Like Kleist, Goethe uses the characters from Homer's *Iliad* as a vehicle for his transformative fable. And like Kleist, profound alienation as well as the aggressive nature of narcissistic love is the focus of Goethe's fable of sexual awakening in his tale of "The New Paris." The adolescent Paris-Goethe finds himself in a garden where he is given an opportunity to play with a little nymph.

42

The title of this instructive fable clearly evokes a connection to the gaze, a connection which is reinforced when the new Paris walks into the garden and the birds call out to him "Paris! Paris! Narcissus! Narcissus!" After dancing with him, the young nymph asks the boy to play with a wonderful set of toy soldiers. She has the army of the Amazons at her disposal and he the troops of Achilles. The battle begins in a playful way, but soon the young Paris-Narcissus-Goethe gives in to a murderous urge to win the game at all costs. He aims his agate marbles with abandon at the enemy soldiers of the Amazon army and destroys the toy figures who nevertheless continue to reassemble. The marbles are reminiscent of the eyes/arrows of love which characterize the deadly glances of Penthesilea and Achilles in Kleist's play. When it is clear that "the new Paris" would

destroy the whole army, the little beauty gives him a blow: “a slap” he said, “which made my head sing. Whereupon, instead of fainting, I returned the blow with fierce kisses.”¹² The new Paris loses all control. The floor began to shake and quiver and the statues in the garden came to life and attacked him, ripping the clothes from his body.

Why does annihilation come into play here? Why is it necessary for the new Paris to overpower the other completely? We see this same desire for annihilation reflected in the actions of Achilles and Penthesilea. Lacan says that the destruction of the other is the necessary movement of the subject captured in the specular relation. “At first before language, desire exists solely in the single plane of the imaginary relation of the specular stage, projected, alienated in the other.” (Lacan *Book I, Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*: 170) The subject’s desire is the desire of the other. The specular relation allows both a unified body image and at the same time erodes the possibility of wholeness since the being is dependent on the other for that image to exist. Lacan states further that “each time that we get close, in a given subject, to this primitive alienation, the most radical aggression arises – the desire for the disappearance of the other in so far as he supports the subject’s desire.” (Lacan *Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*: 170) After the new Paris is struck by the little nymph, instead of losing

43

consciousness, he forces his kisses on her. Desire and violence are linked in an uneasy embrace. This little fable is instructive because it illustrates the function of the mirror and the aggression which calls for the obliteration of the other in the game of narcissistic desire. Goethe’s humorous take on this problem unmasks the real and absurd components of the myth of sexual union, just as Lacan’s example of the *lamella* and Aristophanes’ original fable in the Symposium make light of the deadly nature of Cupid’s arrows. Cupid may look like a silly little fellow but his arrows find their mark and are capable of felling the most powerful of warriors. Goethe’s criticism of Kleist’s play is also too harsh and betrays that perhaps he protests a little too much for other reasons. It is after all Werther’s romantic and obsessive love of Lotte which embodies more than any other work of the time, this myth of narcissistic desire. This love becomes for Lacan the ideal vehicle for describing the fatal nature of the gaze in narcissistic love. Love at first sight can be illustrated by the following illustration:

Remember the first time Werther sees Lotte, as she is cuddling a child. It’s an entirely satisfying image for the *Anlehnungstypus* of the anaclitic plane. It is the way the object coincides with Goethe’s hero’s fundamental image that triggers off his fatal attachment.[. . .] That is what love is. It is one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level. (Lacan: *Book I: Freud’s Papers on Techniques 1953-1954*: p. 142).

Like Penthesilea, Werther’s fatal attachment leaves him only two choices – to win Lotte for himself or to die. His ultimate decision to kill himself made him the archetypal romantic hero. What Goethe won’t admit in his relation to Kleist’s drama is that Penthesilea subverts and reveals the romantic fantasy of his own-star-crossed lovers and the annihilating urges which are at the heart of their attraction to one another. In the end,

Penthesilea, like Werther, must also die, not to integrate her persona, but because she reinserts through the dagger of her own feelings the image of the beloved into herself.

44

For now I will descend
Into myself, as if into a mine,
To dig a killing feeling out as cold
as iron ore. This ore, I will refine it, in the burning
fire of my misery, into hard
steel; then in the hot corrosive poison
of remorse, steep it through and through; to hope's
eternal anvil next I'll carry it,
to hone and point its dagger sharp; and to
this dagger now I offer my breast:
like so! and so! and so! And once
again!-And now all's well. (ll. 3026-3035)¹³
(Topples and dies)

Like Werther's suicide, Penthesilea's death is the inevitable trajectory of a love which ultimately undoes the myth of Romanticism. It reveals the play to be about the deception of looks and gazes. By laying bare the Ur-myth of Romantic yearning, Kleist frees us to look for love beyond the primitive posturing of Cupid's arrows, to find it in a world which allows love to exist within the symbolic order of law and of language, to overcome the annihilating exigencies of the devouring gaze.

Endnotes

¹ Heinrich von Kleist. *Penthesilea*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998 (based on 1808 edition). Unless otherwise indicated, I cite my own translation of Kleist's text and provide the line numbers after the quotation.

² Carol Jacobs: *Uncontrollable Romanticism*. Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. Jacobs in the chapter on Kleist "The Rhetorics of Feminism" (pp.85-114) thinks that Kleist's play creates a wedge in the design of Homer's text, that it is in fact "predicated in a sense on the completion of the Iliad." (p. 86).

³ There have been a number of Lacanian interpretations of Kleist's play. See Chris Cullens and Dorothea von Mücke "Love in Kleist's *Penthesilea* and *Katchen von Heilbrunn*" in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. 63.3 (Sept 1989) 461-493. Cullens and Mücke present a Lacanian perspective on the topic of love in the two plays focusing on the subject in relation to language. Ingrid Stipa. "Kleist's *Penthesilea*: From Misapprehension to Madness" *Seminar* 27.1 (Feb. 1991) 27-38, analyzes the important dramatic moments in the play according to Lacanian principles. Also see Helga Gallas. "Kleists *Penthesilea* und Lacans vier Diskurse." In: *Kontroverse, alte und neue*. Pp. 203-212. Gallas presents a very interesting analysis of desire in the play by using Lacan's discourse

structure. She sees Penthesilea through the discourse of the hysteric and attempts to read her desire in terms of master discourse. For an analysis using object relations theory see Joachim Pfeiffer; "Kleist's Penthesilea. Eine Deutung unter den Aspekten von narzißistischer und ödipaler Problematik." In : *Kontroverse, alte und neue*. Pp. 196-202. In applying Kohut and other object-relation theorists, Pfeiffer postulates an essential self for Penthesilea which is destabilized by her love for Achilles. Thus Achilles becomes a mother substitute. The character's inability to hear is interpreted as an outbreak of the primitive "id" and so on. Ultimately this reading supports a conventional bifurcation of the state of mind of the characters as hovering between dream and reality. While Cullen and Mücke, Gallas and Stipa deal with the concept of narcissistic love as a central and problematic issue in the play, Pfeiffer's analysis ultimately reifies the idea of narcissistic love.

⁴ See various discussions in Jacques Lacan: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York/London: Norton & Comp., 1977. *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York/London: Norton & Co., 1998. *Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. John Forrester. New York/London: Norton & Comp., 1991. *Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*. E. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Sylvia Tomaselli. New York/London: Norton & Comp., 1991. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. E. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Dennis Porter. New York/London: Norton & Co., 1991.

⁵ The Lacanian concept of the gaze has been used in film theory as well by art historians to explain the effect of the image on the spectator. Feminist film theory in particular has appropriated the Lacanian gaze in order to explain the identification of the spectator with the filmic image by positing a variety of "gazes," the director's gaze, the male gaze of the character, the male gaze of the director, etc. By taking Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen*. Vol.16.3, as a template for understanding the gaze, the majority of feminist film critics have understood the "gaze" to be equivalent to the spectator's identification with the eye of the camera through which the a scene is defined. This view has led to the assumption not only that the "gaze" is gendered but that this gendered gaze has agency, that is, that the spectator's perception is controlled by the filmic eye. Psychoanalytic interpretations of Kleist's Penthesilea continue to be influenced by these misunderstood notions of the gaze. See for example, Mathew Pollard "Reading and Writing the Architecture of the Body in Kleist's *Penthesilea*". *Body Dialectics in the Age of Goethe*. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Germanistik. Eds. Marianne Henn and Holger Pausch. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003: 365–391. Pollard refers to the "marked body of Achilles" as demonstrating "what the male gaze has brought together can also be taken apart." (p. 368) This conception of a gendered gaze assumes that the gaze can be controlled. Since Lacan defines the gaze as one of drives in the unconscious, agency of this kind is ruled out. Cullen and Mücke do not make this error and continue to make clear in their reading of Kleist that the protagonists of the play defy gendered categories.

⁶ Jacobs also notes that the Amazons share in this reportage. (Pp.95ff)

⁷ Ibid: p. 95.

⁸ This is a reference to the treatment of Hektor, who Achilles dragged around Troy by binding the tendons of both feet to his chariot. This left Hektor's head to trail behind him.

⁹ E.L. Stahl in *Heinrich von Kleist's Dramas*. Oxford: Basil, Blackwell Press, 1948 presents an interesting comparison between version 1 and 2 of Kleist's play. He points out that Kleist's changes emphasize the responsibility of Otere's words as responsible for choosing Achilles as her daughter's future mate and are critical to Penthesilea's actions. (P. 76). I agree, but it is not Penthesilea's guilt which is the issue here but the consequences of the words of the Other, whose desire initiates the break from the Amazonian law and pushes Penthesilea into the dramatic trajectory of dyadic union with the one, the only one for her. Stahl further argues that the additions made to version 2 of the play change the focus from passion to the power of external forces. Thus Stahl and others assume that Penthesilea's guilt, her tragic flaw, is that she cannot free herself from Amazonian law and thus incurs the wrath of the gods. A Lacanian reading dismisses the idea of guilt and places the tragedy into the domain of passion. Thus these changes in Kleist's second version emphasize the importance of the symbolic-order-words (Oteres' directive) which actually strengthens the connection of Penthesilea's passion to the alienating words of the Other.

¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe quoting Johann Daniel Falk (1768-1826) in *Lebens Spuren* Nr. 281. The translation of Goethe's text in this paper are my own.

¹¹ Goethe composed the fable "The new Paris" ["Der neue Paris"] in 1811 and it appears in book two of his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The similarities are striking. Are they a mere coincidence since we know that Kleist's play *Penthesilea* was in his hands already in 1808, the year Kleist published the drama? Since Goethe refused to give Kleist a direct review of the play, is this his response?

¹² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Ed. by Karl Richter, et al. 21 vols. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag 1985ff. Here *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, vol.16, p.63.

¹³ I have cited this passage from the following translation: *Penthesilea*. In *Heinrich von Kleist: Five Plays*. Translated by Martin Greenberg. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988, (pp.159-269). P.268.

Achilles, Achilles, where art thou?! I love you till death. [permalink](#). [embed](#).¹ This is probably something that Penthesilea would've been particularly conscious of because of what happened to her sister Hippolyta, which was a crime perpetuated by mythological Greeks that tended to have about as much regard for women who fought as their historical counterparts, which is to say, very, very little. By dismissing her as a warrior after what should've been one of the most important moments in her career as such, Achilles pretty much struck at the core of who Penthesilea was while also prodding a huge sore point, which is more than enough reason for her to be very, ve *The Deadly Gaze: Penthesilea and Achilles in Love*. Evelyn K. Moore. Kleists drama *Penthesilea* is predicated on the Greek Epic Cycle and especially on Homers *Iliada* story which originates in the illicit desire of Paris for Helen of Troy. 1 Their love and Helens subsequent abduction is the direct cause of the war between the Trojans and the Greeks. Penthesilea who kills Achilles in the brutal battle for his heart. This chiasmic reversal reveals a powerful and indeed shocking turn of events. In stories of the Greek epic tradition, Achilles, after he killed Penthesilea, had honored her body in death. But in Kleists play, Achilles, the greatest of Greek heroes, blessed with invincibility in battle by his mother the goddess Thetis, dies a brutal death at the hand of Penthesilea. Create. Make social videos in an instant: use custom templates to tell the right story for your business. Screen Recorder. Record and instantly share video messages from your browser. Live Streaming. Broadcast your events with reliable, high-quality live streaming. Enterprise. Get your team aligned with all the tools you need on one secure, reliable video platform.