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Comparison of Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen" with Kleist's "Michael Kohlhaas."

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Thesis

A COMPARISON OF GOETHE'S "GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN"
WITH KLEIST'S "MICHAEL KOHLHAAS."

Submitted by

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I

Introduction

On reading Kleist's historical novel *Michael Kohlhaas*, my attention was continually attracted to the numerous similarities to Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*.

Both works treat of historical characters who, having been wronged and denied justice, take it upon themselves to secure redress against their enemies. These two individuals, Michael Kohlhaas and Götz von Berlichingen by name, lived, according to the chronicles, at the same time. Both, having been victims of laws aimed against them, turned to arms to obtain justice. The success of Götz and of Kohlhaas, in their quest for redress, is parallel, for both enjoy a continued stroke of victory until they are finally induced through treacherous promises to surrender. They give themselves up, but instead of obtaining justice, they are prosecuted for violence. While Götz is being abused as a prisoner, his brother-in-law and confederate threatens to plunder the country-side as Kohlhaas' lieutenant actually does in a similar case. Both break their oath and take up arms again.

The characters of both *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Michael Kohlhaas* bear similar names. For example: the name Elizabeth, which Goethe gave to the wife of Götz and which is his own mother's name, is found to be the name of Kohlhaas' wife. Lerse, who represents the valiant companion and knight of Götz, reappears in Kleist's work as Herse, a faithful servant of Kohlhaas. Olearius, the eminent jurist in *Götz von Berlichingen*, reappears as a famous astrologist in *Michael Kohlhaas*. 
The above similarities of time, of action, or theme, and of characters have instilled in me a desire to compare the two works in an attempt to show the influence of Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen on Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas.
In Goethe, the author of Götz von Berlichingen, we find a writer who holds a high place in German literature which corresponds to that held by Shakespeare in England, Cervantes in Spain and Dante in Italy. His lofty position is almost unique among the greatest of his contemporaries, predecessors and successors. Schiller himself, who is most worthily associated with him, is far inferior in breadth of sympathy and in splendor of creative impulse. Although Goethe is strongly marked by national characteristics, he still belongs to the world rather than to a particular country. The genius of his time has begun to fade, but his works still maintain their popularity. It will always be fresh, since it possesses that immortal spirit which, having once found its way into the hearts of mankind, lingers on forever.

He was indeed fortunate in possessing all those qualities and characteristics which make for success. His health was good throughout his life. His family occupied a high position in the town. His education was irregular; he went to no common school and his father stimulated rather than instructed him. Thus he received, in his early years, the best intellectual training that one may obtain. His excellent background was further augmented by the atmosphere with which he was surrounded. Frankfurt, where Goethe lived, still maintained the appearance of the Middle Ages. Although it had lost much of its power, its citizens still grew up with a strong
sense of independence. From his earliest days, young Goethe was accustomed to the companionship of his elders. His father was strict and formal, his mother quick and lively, endowed with no small share of the genius of her son. Goethe lived in free intercourse with every kind of society in town. His home was a cultivated one, for his father was fond of art and of German poetry. It is further to Goethe's advantage that he appeared when he did, at a time when the world was ready to receive his genius.

The most admirable quality found in Goethe is the wide scope of his knowledge. As in the case of Jean de Meung, no aspect of human existence was strange to him. He possessed the power of dramatizing in his mind elements of life to which he was led. It is the ability to record these dramatizations which marked him as a genius. He was able to appreciate all ideals of humanity, and sought to find their real meaning. Far was it from Goethe to praise Hellenic culture and to wrong mediaevalism; or to condemn Paganism in the light of Christianity. To his mind art did not conflict with science; patriotism was not so narrow to him as to mean "Deutschland über Alles."

This gift of Goethe's, when incorporated in his literature, led to real literary achievement. That Goethe had a poetic nature is very obvious in his writings. Thus we find that Goethe reflects the real world to us; his images are shaped and colored by his own thoughts and feelings. In this way he combines realism with idealism to produce remarkable writings.
Goethe's early works bear the impress of turbulent feeling. Of these, the first published was Götz von Berlichingen, which instantly established his fame as one of the chief writers of the "Sturm und Drang" school. It is almost as formless as their inartistic writings. The language is sometimes excessively rude. There is no attempt to combine the different scenes into an harmonious picture. Yet it is sharply separated from the tasteless plays with which it was compared, for everywhere we find traces of immature power. The characters are alive. They act and react upon each other as we should expect men and women to do in a stormy and troubled epoch; and by a few touches of apparently unconscious art, we are made to realize the vital change through which the society of the age of the Reformation was passing.

Die Leiden des jungen Werthers gave Goethe a European reputation. Much of its sentimentalism now excites smiles instead of tears; but with all its faults, it has an enduring fascination. It breathes a warm love of nature, of which it presents a vivid picture; it conveys a powerful impression of the mingled force, sweetness, and unreasonableness of early passion; and it deeply expresses the weariness of life which forms one of the moods of poetic youth, and the manifestation of which was a favorite pastime of the less sincere "Sturm und Drang". The promise of Götz and Werther was not sustained by all the works produced in the first part of his career. Clavigo is only a fairly good acting play. It represents a young writer of ambition deserting the woman to whom he is engaged. The fifth act,

*Only early important works are mentioned here.*
in which Clavigo kills himself, is of Goethe's own conception. The real Clavigo died a distinguished man of letters in 1806. The piece was written in eight days. It had a great success, and still keeps the stage. However, Goethe's best friends were disappointed with it. Merck told him not to write such trash, as other could do that as well.

Stella has even more of the extravagant sentimentalism of Werther, with only an occasional touch of its poetry. Soon we have the conception of Caesar, Faust, Mahomet, The Wandering Jew, and Prometheus. The first was soon given up; of the second, the first monologue, the dialogue between Faust and Mephistopheles, and part of the scenes with Gretchen, were now written. He tells us in his Autobiography what he intended to make of Mahomet. In five acts, he was to show us how the purity of prophetic zeal is recognized by love, rejected by envy, sullied by human weakness, and spiritualized by death.

To write this drama, he had studied the Koran through and through. Of the Wandering Jew, very little remains to us. The design conceived in Italy of making a great work of the subject was never carried out.

Prometheus expresses a grand defiance that is more impressive because of the deep philosophic thought which may be traced to his background.

It was, however, in his lyrics that the richly varied life of Goethe's youth most perfectly revealed itself. There are hardly any German lyrics, if we except Heine's, which deserve to be compared with Goethe's: perhaps none in any literature have more subtle charm. Profiting by the teaching of Herder, he studied the artless beauty of the best songs of the people, some of which he gave new forms, while retaining their primitive simplicity. His own lyrics are at once popu-
lar and artistic. He takes as his theme the joys, the longings, the regrets which all men understand, and wedds them to melodies of delightful ease and grace. His poems seem to be suggested by some passing emotion of his own. His ballads are not as a rule so powerful as his songs, but they have one quality in common—without elaborate descriptions, they continually call up, by an apparently accidental word or phase, a clear vision of some natural object or scene. He is equally master of himself in rendering Nature as a mirror in which we see the reflection of our own experience, or as a power moving on in calm indifference to our hopes and fears.

Getting back to Prometheus, we find that it was completed in two acts. The monologue included in Lyrical Poems, was written at the same time; but critics doubt whether it was intended to form part of the drama.

The works conceived at this time are to be referred to the study of the ethics of Spinoza, for whom Goethe now began to feel a deep reverence, which continued throughout his life. The calm repose of Spinoza's mind spread over his own life a breath of peace; his sympathetic and well-ordered reasoning was the best antidote to Goethe's passionate waywardness. Goethe now acquired a wider view of the moral and natural world; he that had never seen the world so clearly.

In 1775 Goethe settled in Weimar, where Wieland already was, and where he was ultimately followed by Herder and Schiller, so that the little town became the center of the intellectual life of Germany. After an interval of ten years, during which he published nothing, he paid a visit to Italy. Here his genius was kindled anew, and a close study of sculpture and painting suggested to him the necessity of sub-
mitting more fully than he had yet done to the permanent laws of art. The fruits of this experience were Iphigenie, Tasso, and Egmont, all of which he took with him to Italy in an unfinished form. The first two of these dramas were accepted as imitations of the antique, but they are only so in the sense that in each the parts are rigidly subordinated to the intention of the whole, and they are marked by elevation and simplicity of style. While inconsiderably more finished as works of art than ant of the greater works he had before produced, they indicated no falling off in imagination. Iphigenie, although its subject is Greek, is in tone and motive altogether Christian. It would be difficult to name a more attractive picture of a modern lady than the pure and lightminded heroine. In Tasso, Goethe draws in strong and sure outlines the sorrows of a poetic nature which will not sharply discriminate the real from its own ideal world. This dramatic poem is hardly more remarkable for the truth and vividness of its conceptions than for the charm of its versification and the unusual beauty of its language. Egmont, however, has more movement and touches human experience at deeper points. Most readers agree with Schiller's criticism that there is too much melodrama in the closing scene in which Klärchen appears to the hero as the spirit of freedom, and that, notwithstanding the liberties taken with history, Goethe has hardly succeeded in making Egmont the type of an enemy of despotism. But Klärchen in a beautiful study of a mind stirred to love by great resolves.

C. Historical Background of the Drama

In order to fully understand this drama it is necessary to
know something of the status of the Free Knights in Germany during the 16th century. We find that the reign of Maximilian is regarded in many respects as the end of the Middle Ages. The feudal relation between the king and the princes, and between the princes and their vassals had become purely nominal. No real control was exerted by the crown over the heads of the various states, and now that the war was carried on by mercenary troops, the mediate nobles did not hold their lands on condition of military service. The princes were sovereigns, not merely feudal lords; and by the institution of local diets in their territories an approach was made to modern conceptions of government.

The age of war was far indeed from being over, but men had at least begun to see that unnecessary bloodshed is an evil, and that the true outlet for the mass of human energies is not conflict but peaceful industries. By the growth of the cities in social if not in political importance, the products of labor were being more and more widely distributed, and it was now incomparably easier than at any previous time for the nation to be moved by common ideas and impulses. Although this trend toward emancipation was very strong, there were still numerous imperfect elements in the government of the empire. We find that two classes, the free knights and the peasants, have no direct representation in the diet. Added still more to the bitterness of the above two classes was the abolition of private warfare and the establishment of an imperial court of justice. This would seem to us a step in the right direction, but it was far from being so. Since the free knight was denied the privilege of securing justice by arms against the powerful princes, his only redress was in the court—the stronghold of his enemies, the nobility.
Formerly the free-knight had a place in the army of the sovereign. Now foreign troops were hired in preference, and any knight that entered the service of the emperor did so at a great sacrifice of his dignity.

The 16th century is strongly marked in Germany by the rapid development of the cities. The whole nation was taking on commercial aspects. This change was not pleasing to the knights since their estates were losing considerable value.

The changes mentioned above picture the poor plight of the free knight in Germany during the 16th century. He was like a primitive individual in modern settings. His environment was new, his financial condition bad, justice was denied him. The struggle to maintain himself was a very bitter one. It is concerning the struggle of one of these free knights that Goethe wrote the drama Götz von Berlichingen.

The life of Götz is found in his Lebensbeschreibung. He states that he was born in 1480 at Jaxthausen, which was situated near Heidelberg. In his youth he was little fond of books and sought to acquaint himself with the manner of warfare. In 1495 he was a page to his cousin, Konrad von Berlichingen, whom he served for three years. Later he served under the Margrave of Brandenburg, under whose charge he participated in many important battles. While in his early twenties, he lost his right hand in battle. This was replaced with an iron one; and we find that this did not detract from his fame as a fighter. It is because of this iron hand that he is known to us as "Götz of the iron hand".

He became engaged in those forbidden petty feuds. He had sacked the city of Nuremberg and had attacked the Bishop of Bamberg's
troop. Sometime later (1519) he opposed the Swabian league. For this he was captured and imprisoned. By the payment of a large sum of money and by swearing not to bear arms again, he was released. He did not abide by this oath, for in 1525 we find him fighting once more with the league, this time as a captain of the peasants. Again he was captured and released on taking the oath of "Urfehde" which bound him to his home for ten years.

He remained there until pardoned by Charles V, who released him to fight against foreign enemies. He also served in other expeditions. His last years were spent in peaceful surroundings, where he was occupied with the writing of his Lebensbeschreibung.
D. Reasons for Composition of "Götz"

The work into which Goethe threw all his genius was the dramatization of the history of the imperial knight of the Middle Ages, Götz von Berlichingen. The immediate cause of this enterprise was Goethe’s enthusiasm for Shakespeare. In October 1771 he delivered his famous Shakespeare oration. After reading Shakespeare he felt, he said, like a blind man who suddenly receives his sight. The unit- ties of time and place vanished into nothing. The true form of art was seen to be that which holds the wayward impulses together by an invisible bond, just as in the life of man necessity is wedded to free will.

This literary attitude of Goethe can be traced back to the time when he entered the University of Strassburg. His father sent him there to perfect himself in French, but the actual affect of his stay in that territory was to make him bitter against the French, especially with the classic French drama, and to excite in him a fervid love for things German.

Herder, who was a few years older than Goethe, swayed the latter to oppose the literary rules and standards laid down by the French.

A year later Goethe is admitted to the bar, but we find that his interests are in literary projects rather than in legal pursuits. His letters tell us that he was very much occupied at this time, working on an undertaking "superior to the genius of Shake- speare and Homer". The product of this effort was a dry and dull biography of Götz von Berlichingen published in 1771. This biography
supplied the subject for his awakened power. From this miserable sketch he conceived within his mind a complete picture of Germany in the 16th century. The chief characters of his play are creatures of his imagination representing the principal types which make up the history of the time.

It is interesting to note how much Goethe was interested in Götz. He was deeply touched by the condition of the free-knight and his hard struggle for justice. The autobiography of Götz awakened in Goethe a desire to set forth in drama the uprightness, fairness, and courage of a noble soul oppressed by forces too strong to combat. Goethe took it upon himself to dramatize "the conflict between individual liberty and the necessary progress of society toward law and order."
It is indeed strange that the genius Heinrich von Kleist was descended from a family of soldiers rather than from a family of literary artists. He was born on October 8, 1777 at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, which is located in the heart of Brandenburg. It is here that, from the early days, stern discipline prevailed to produce a stronger type of fighting man. Kleist's family was no exception, for many generals are numbered among his ancestors. During his early years he was destined for a military career and became an officer at an early age. He resigned at twenty, with the rank of second lieutenant, to prepare himself for the university. In doing so he opposed the wishes of his family, which desired him to seek a military career. He applied himself very diligently to his studies. As often as possible, he hurried home to relate his recently acquired knowledge to his family and friends. This desire to relate things was later very significant in his work. He was then engaged to Wilhelmina von Zenge, who had a very strong influence on his life. He now sought a career, perhaps with the intention of marrying soon. Finding dissatisfaction in this step, he began to study Kant's philosophy. He applied himself with laborious zeal in the quest for absolute truth only to be deeply disappointed. In the meanwhile, we note that a romantic love for nature has seized him in his travels. Accompanied by his sister Ulrike, he set out for Paris. Kleist now began to feel that literary work was his vocation. Completely overcome by this strong creative
impulse, he sought to locate himself away from society in order to pursue his literary urge. He planned to buy a small farm in Switzerland and to live there with his betrothed. Wilhelmina's objection to this plan caused him to become estranged from her. However, he did journey to Switzerland himself (December 1801) and became acquainted with a group of young authors: the novelist Zschokke, the publisher Gessner, and Ludwig Wieland. To this group Kleist read his first tragedy. At first it had a Spanish setting. This play later was given a German background, and was published under the title of "Die Familie Schroffenstein". This first drama of Kleist's is a tragedy of fate in which man is tossed around as a ship on the high seas, until he meets his doom. One can read between the lines the disappointment of Kleist and his conception of the helplessness of man. Soon after a comedy, Der Zerbrochene Krug, was produced as a result of a wager among Kleist's friends. This work has been regarded as one of the most effective one-act comedies in German literature. It presents a vivid picture of a village judge sitting in judgement upon a crime which he himself has committed. It is with comic efforts that the judge seeks to avoid the guilt.

In 1802 political disturbances caused Kleist to leave Bern for Thun. There he lived in seclusion, reading no books or periodicals, seeing only some close friends from Bern. His chief interest now was in literary projects, particularly the drama. During this stay he led a miserable life, fearing that his health would not hold out until he finished his work. Added to this misery was the refusal of Wilhelmina to marry him and to share a rural life. It was during this period that the drama Robert Guiskard was produced. It was by
means of this work that he had hoped to "pluck the laurel" from the brow of Goethe. Guiskard has a masterly exposition. The story is of a young man, the hero of his troops, who is stricken by the plague at the height of his career. Many features of this drama are borrowed from the Greek tragedy; the introductory chorus, the many speeches, and the analytical action which commences on the turn of fate.

Guiskard had, evidently, absorbed too much of his effort, as Kleist soon fell sick. His loyal sister hurried once more to his side to persuade him to go back to Germany. Ulrike parted while Kleist went to Osmannstädt to spend some time at the estate of Wieland. Here Kleist was profoundly stimulated in his literary work.

From Osmannstädt he went first to Leipzig and then to Dresden, where he continued his fruitless efforts to complete Robert Guiskard. Once more he became despondent and thoughts of suicide entered his mind. Persuaded by his friend Pfuel, he took a trip through Switzerland, Italy, and France. In France he sought death in the army, but was thwarted in this attempt by a friend. Kleist was now, once more, without ambition or money. As his literary hopes did not materialize, Ulrike demanded that he should renounce a literary career.

We find that he suddenly appears in Königsberg, where he receives a civil appointment for two years. His petition for a higher appointment was refused due to his inability to explain satisfactorily his trip to France.

In 1805 he secured a special appointment to enable him to continue his literary work. At this time he translated Molière's "Amphitryon" and La Fontaine's "Les Deux Pigeons". He now began Penthesilea, in which he portrayed his struggle for the completion of Guiskard. This work contains a taste of passions and abundant imaginative beauty.
This work, which was written with the utmost effort, won him a pension from Queen Louise.

His writings now began to attract worldwide attention. Adam Heinrich Müller, a young writer had interested himself in Kleist's work, and had the dramatic adaptation of Amphitryon published. Kleist now undertook the publication of a literary journal, "Phöbus", in which he had hoped to print his writings. This enterprise did not prosper and was but short-lived. Kleist, however, did manage to print in it excerpts from Penthesilea, Der zerbrochene Krug, Robert Guiskard, Das Kathchen von Heilbronn, Die Marquis von O--, and part of his narrative Michael Kohlhaas.

Once more, Kleist was gloomy. The spirit of war was in the air—a spirit of bitterness prevailed. The works of this period are Die Hermannsschlacht and Michael Kohlhaas in its completed form. The former portrays the ardent patriotism of the author and his violent hatred of Napoleon as an oppressor.


Since his dramas and narratives yielded such scant returns, Kleist once more started a journal, the "Berliner Abendblätter," in which some of his stories were published. It seems that Kleist was offered a grant from the government toward the upkeep of this periodical. This offer failed to materialize due to his criticism of the governmental policy. His journal failed and he sought an indemnity from the government. His quest was in vain, and after a dramatic
plea to the king, he was offered a commission in the army, which, due to his inability to buy a uniform, he turned down.

Kleist, seeing only despair before him, went to the country, near Potsdam, with Henriette Vogel, the high-strung wife of a Berlin merchant, and in accordance with romantic agreement, on November 21, 1811 he shot first her and then himself. A simple stone marks the spot where the great poet lies buried.

B. Historical Background of Michael Kohlhaas

The historical background of this narrative can be traced to Peter Haft, who is the ultimate source. In his chronicle we find that the horse-dealer's name was Hans Kohlhase instead of Michael Kohlhaas. The synopsis of the story of Hans Kohlhases, as told by Haft, serves well to give the picture which Kleist drew on for his narrative. It is as follows: Kohlhases, a respected citizen of Colln-on-the-Spree, was taking a string of horses into Saxony, when he was halted by a nobleman, who asserted that the horses had been stolen. Being compelled to leave the horses in the possession of the nobleman, Kohlhase departed in order to bring proof of his ownership of the horses. On his return, however, he found that the horses had been almost worked to death, and he refused to receive them, demanding that their money value be paid instead. This was refused, and when he had applied in vain to the Elector of Saxony for justice, he declared war. After burning a part of the city of Wittenberg and doing other damage, he was pursued by the Elector's forces, but unsuccessfully, chiefly because the Elector of Brandenberg connived at his doings.

in order to induce him to desist from his burning and plundering. Thereupon the horse-dealer went secretly to Wittenberg to lay the matter before Dr. Luther, who persuaded him not to inflict any further damage upon the land of Saxony. Luther in turn promised to intervene in his behalf, but all his efforts, as well as several conferences that Kohlhase had with his adversaries at Jütterback remained fruitless. Therefore Georg Nagelschmidt, an associate of Kohlhase, advised him to attack the Elector of Brandenberg in the hope that the latter would hasten then to bring about a settlement of the affair. Kohlhase followed this advice, and robbed Konrad Dratziger, an agent of the Elector, who had been purchasing silver bullion for his master. But this resulted disastrously for Kohlhase, as the Elector sent out men who succeeded in capturing the robber. He was tortured, tried and convicted of having broken the public peace. The punishment was death on the wheel, and although this was to have been commuted to death by the sword, he refused this mercy at the instance of Nagelschmidt, who represented to him that as they had been companions in arms, they ought also to suffer the same death. After the execution, the Elector of Brandenberg repented, and if he had had to do it over again, he would probably not have ordered Kohlhase to be executed.

C. Kleist's Conception of the Story

Kleist's friend Pfuel sought to have him write a tragedy based on the information given in Haft's chronicle. Pfuel went even a step further and challenged him to do so, a similar case as in Der zerbröchene Krug. In the source Kleist found a brave man who, pos-
essed with a desire for justice against the law of might, became an outlaw. Fate gave him a tragic end.

The motive was there for Kleist, and his fertility shone forth. His strong imagination grasped the picture immediately and built it up. His task was threefold, above all the solidification of the events that the chronicle loosely told. Kleist had to bring the tale together to find the base, the center-point, and to group the heroes. There was not to remain any longer the heterogeneous events in Brandenburg and Saxony in which a horse-dealer and robber captain—Kohlhaas was involved, but deeds and sorrows of a man of destiny surrounded by lands and people.

The individual people are not there by chance. They receive their importance and color from their relation to Kohlhaas' fate. This is true of Luther and the Princes, more so of the various nobles, knights and public officers. With Haft these all have their independent functions and simply cross each other's paths while the Kohlhaas matter is pending in their jurisdiction.

The second task of Kleist was to clarify the characters. The annals state that in such and such a time, such a man lived and such events happened. Kleist had to omit, alter and introduce characters to conform to his own version. It is here that Kleist drew largely from Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen. After Kleist had created his characters he gave each one a certain place, time and bearing in connection with the narrative.

Thirdly, Kleist's patriotic zeal got the best of him, and we find that Kohlhaas becomes in a good mood, as well as in a bad mood, a stronger person than in his source—he becomes an unchange-
able person. In the source, he appears as a brave man who, being vexed, seeks revenge, although half-heartedly. He is hesitant to burn, plunder, lay waste and kill. Kleist's Kohlhaas is fully determined to avenge, but wants to make sure. Thus we have his conversation with Herse, in which he questions his servant in order to obtain the true facts.
IV

Theme of Götz von Berlichingen

In the beginning of the play we gather that Götz, whom everybody considers brave and generous, is at war with the Bishop of Bamberg, an ecclesiastical prince. It seems that the priest is very selfish and untrustworthy, for, although Götz has repeatedly aided him, the latter has abused this generosity and has captured one of Götz's pages. Götz's troops are now lying in wait for Weislingen, the Bishop's right-hand man, a former friend, but now an enemy. Scouts are sent out to ascertain Weislingen's whereabouts. It is reported that the latter is hiding nearby in the forest.

Götz sets out with his band to capture Weislingen. He succeeds in doing so and takes his prisoner to his castle in Jaxthausen.

In the next scene we are introduced to Elizabeth, the wife of Götz, to Maria, his sister, and to Karl, his little son. Götz has been gone five days and nights. His wife is not worried over his absence as is his sister Maria. Elizabeth is telling her son that his father has gone out to collect a debt due a man, who won the first prize in the archery contest, when the bugle sounds announcing the return of Götz and his prisoner.

Götz is extremely happy with his prize, for this time he hopes to win back his old friend. Weislingen is told to make himself at home. We learn that he and Götz have been friends since boyhood days, but that the former had been swayed to abandon the free and independent life of a knight to become a polished courtier. Since Weislingen appears to be of weak character and repenting nature, it
does not seem impossible for Götz to win him back.

In the next scene we have a picture of the Bishop's court at Bamberg. A conversation takes place between the Bishop, Olearius, a priest, and others in which loud praises are heard for the German students of law at Bologna, and for the Roman law, introduced into Germany in the interests of the Princes, as opposed to those of the people.

In the meantime, Weislingen has become very fond of Maria and the betrothal of the pair seems to seal the eternal friendship of Weislingen and Götz. As the household is rejoicing over the happy turn of affairs, Franz, the page of Weislingen, arrives to entice his master back to the court of Bamberg. He tells Weislingen of the arrival at court of the charming young widow, Adelheid von Walldorf.

Franz is not successful, and Liebetraut is sent on the same mission. Once Weislingen arrives at court, the Bishop is sure that Adelheid's charm will keep him there. Weislingen is finally induced to go to the court and remains there.

In the meanwhile, Götz and Selbitz prepare to attack the citizens of Nuremberg because they turned over his page to Bamberg. Selbitz, now suspicious of Weislingen's good faith, influences Götz to send Georg to Bamberg in order to ascertain the status of Weislingen. Georg returns and reports that the latter is voluntarily staying at Bamberg and that he has renounced his allegiance to Götz.

The next scene is shifted to Adelheid's chambers. She is disgusted with Weislingen and promises to love him only on condition that he crush Götz.

We then find Götz and Selbitz present at a marriage dinner.
From the conversation which takes place we gather that the bride's father and the bridegroom have a court dispute over a boundary. The suit was so drawn out and costly that the parties involved decided to settle the dispute by marriage. The purpose of this scene is, evidently, an attempt to portray the corruptness of the courts, and the sad plight of the poor man who tries to obtain justice.

The first scene of the next act opens with a plea to the Emperor Maximilian, by two merchants of Nuremberg, to have restored the goods stolen from them by Götz. Weislingen, who happens to be with the Emperor at the time, influences the latter to have an imperial force sent against Götz, and to execute him under the ban.

In the next scene Sickingen comes to Jaxthausen to ask for the hand of Maria. Götz gratefully accepts him, and the latter promises to send aid.

The third scene portrays the fear and respect that the imperial soldiers have for Götz. Each one attempts to avoid the painful duty of capturing him.

Götz visits his future brother-in-law to tell him of the order for his arrest that had been sent out. Götz, not wishing to draw Sickingen into the dispute, spurns his offer of aid.

One day a tall young man comes to Götz and begs to serve under him. We gather from the conversation that this fellow, whose name is Lerse, had once encountered Götz in battle and, being impressed by the bravery and courage of the latter, had vowed to fight under him. Götz readily accepts his service.

In the next few scenes which follow, the movements of the imperial troops are portrayed. Their encounters with Götz are not
successful, but finally an overwhelming force surrounds him. Just before the capture, Götz, having gathered all his troops about him, shares with them his last bottle of wine. We note that at this point, Georg, who was but a young man at the beginning of the play, has developed into a brave soldier.

In the meantime, Sickingen and Maria marry, thus strengthening the bonds of friendship between Götz and his brother-in-law.

In the fourth act Götz is brought to trial before the imperial councillors. On his refusal to sign a document declaring that he was a rebel, an attempt is made to subdue him. Just then word arrives that Sickingen is on his way with two hundred soldiers to rescue Götz. He is released on swearing to the oath of "Urfehde", which condemns him to a life of inactivity.

The next scene takes place in Adelheid's castle. From the conversation between Adelheid and Weislingen, we gather that the latter is filled with jealousy on account of the attention which his wife is receiving from Charles. We also find that Franz, Weislingen's page, is deeply in love with Adelheid, who does not spurn his attentions.

The last act opens with the plundering of a town by the peasants under the command of Link and Metzler. A group of peasants call on Götz and beseech him to be their leader. Götz, after being threatened, finally agrees on the following conditions: (1) that he serve only for four weeks; (2) that the peasants refrain from wholesale burning, plundering, and murder. Götz sends his faithful servant, Lerse, to stay with his wife while he sets out as a leader of the rebels.
In the meantime, Götz’s enemies, having heard that he broke his oath, set out under the leadership of Weislingen to capture him. It is not long before the peasants break their promise to Götz.

Word comes to Götz that his pursuers are in the neighborhood. He flees to a camp of gypsies where he is given refuge. The troops of the Swabian league pursue him and take him prisoner.

The next scene is shifted to Adelheid’s chamber. She tells Franz to show his true affection for her by poisoning his master, Weislingen.

We then find Maria going to Weislingen’s castle in an effort to obtain mercy for her brother. She finds Weislingen in a weakened condition, and begs him to save her brother. He tears up the execution warrant just as Franz comes into the room weeping.

He tells his master that he poisoned him at the instigation of his wife. Weislingen dies. Adelheid is sentenced to death for his murder. Götz dies in the prison garden, surrounded by his wife, Maria, and Lerse.
Theme of Michael Kohlhaas

One day an honest, godfearing, and industrious young man, who was a horsedealer by trade, was taking a string of horses, all well fed, to the fairs in Saxony, which was just beyond the border. While riding, he considered himself well content with his lot, and, like Samaniego's "Lechera", who anticipated her profits too hastily while carrying the pail of milk to the market, the horsedealer, Kohlhaas by name, was likewise thinking of what he would do with the profits before the sale was enacted. While thus engaged, he reached the Elbe, where he was halted by the castellan of the squire, who demanded his passport. Kohlhaas replied that he had crossed the border seventeen times before and was never that a passport was required. He further requested to see the squire, which request was granted to him. The horsedealer pleaded with the squire to allow him to journey on to the fairs so that he might sell his horses. He finally obtained consent to proceed, but only on condition that he leave two horses behind, as a pledge that he would obtain a passport at Dresden. The horsedealer saw that he would have to give in on this occasion and, leaving his groom behind to take care of the horses, he went on his way.

At Dresden, Kohlhaas learned that a passport was not necessary, and being of a forgiving nature, and thinking that they had been joking with him, he returned with no other resentment than that caused by the general misery of the world.

He went to the stable to claim his horses, but much to his
surprise, instead of seeing his horses well-fed and glossy-coated as
he had left them he spied "eine Paar dürre, abgehärmte Mähren; knochen,
denen man, wie Riegeln, hätte Sachen aufhängen können; Mähren und
Haare ohne Wartung und Pflege zusammengeknäult: das wahre Bild des
Elends im Tierreiche!"

Kohlhaas was indignant when he learned that the cause for
the present condition of the beasts was that they had been overworked
in the fields. He further learned that his groom had been beaten and
sent away. In answer to Kohlhaas's inquiry, the castellan replied
that the former should be glad that the horses were alive, and that
the groom had been sent away because he attempted to steal the horses.

On his arrival home, Kohlhaas was informed that his servant
had been beaten and, only by good fortune, had he escaped when he
attempted to prevent the ill-treatment which was being accorded the
horses.

Kohlhaas, being strongly incensed, commenced a lawsuit a-
against the owner of the castle, the Squire Wenzel Tronka, to recover
damages. His suit progressed very slowly and, sometime later, the
lawyer, his friend, gave him to understand that it was impossible to
obtain justice against the squire, who had relations in high stations
at court. Once more Kohlhaas tried to obtain justice, this time
through the governor of Brandenburg, but once more, to his dismay, his
petition was dismissed.

No longer did the wretched man take an interest in horse-
breeding, his house, or his farm; scarcely even in his wife and
children. His rage was further augmented when he was told to send
for his horses. He invited a bailiff, who was his neighbor, to
purchase his estate, much to the displeasure of his wife, Lisbeth, who conceived the true meaning of the sale.

The horsedealer was now determined to go to the Elector and to personally demand justice; but his wife, who in her younger days had been courted by the castellan of the Elector's palace, asked permission of her husband to present the petition.

Unfortunately, the castellan was not at the palace when Lisbeth called, and in some mysterious manner she was stabbed in the breast. She died as a result of this wound, thus influencing Kohlhaas, more than ever, to pursue his suit.

Kohlhaas had already reached the end of his patience; his loyalty to the state, the courts, and his fellow men had turned into a hatred; he was now determined to take the reins of justice into his own hands. With the aid of his servant Herse, and several others, he attacked the Squire's castle, smote the inhabitants, and had his men lay waste the grounds. In the excitement, however, his main prey, Squire Wenzel Tronka, disappeared.

Upon learning that the Squire had escaped to a convent, of which his aunt was the Abbess, Kohlhaas issued a decree, declaring that all who aided the Squire would be his mortal enemies. He then pursued the Squire to Wittenberg and demanded that he be surrendered.

When the inhabitants refused to comply with his request he sacked the city, burned it, and defeated the troops sent against him. Under the same conditions he burned Leipzig.

His incendiary actions became so alarming that Dr. Luther took a hand in the matter in order to steer Kohlhaas from his godless deeds back to the field of righteousness. This plea of Dr. Luther cause Kohlhaas to call on the reverend doctor and to tell him his en-
tire story. In reciprocation for Luther's assurance of intercession in his behalf, Kohlhaas promised to lay down his arms.

As a result of Luther's action, the lawsuit was investigated, and it was found that the Chamberlain and the Cupbearer to the Elector had illicitly used their official powers to stop the case of Kohlhaas. A guard was given Kohlhaas to protect him during the pending of his lawsuit. At the same time a judgement came through that the Squire would have to feed the horses until he had restored them to their normal condition.

Kleist then describes a scene in the market-place, at which Kohlhaas is called upon to identify his horses. At this scene the Elector's Chamberlain was seriously injured by the mob; this caused a sentiment that was extremely detrimental to Kohlhaas. To increase this bad feeling, against the poor man, news was received that his lieutenant, Nagelschmidt by name, was laying waste the countryside.

The next morning, Kohlhaas learned that his amnesty had been revoked, and that he would be tried on charges growing out of his self-imposed decrees. He was taken with his five children to Berlin to face the charges. There he was visited by the Elector of Saxony, who was disguised, and Lady Helofse, the wife of the Chamberlain. Kohlhaas, on this occasion, produced a locket, the sight of which caused the Elector to disclose his identity, and swoon.

We discover that this locket was given Kohlhaas by a gypsy, and it contains a piece of paper on which are written vital matters pertaining to the future of the house of Saxony. The Elector much determined to have the locket, and sends his representative to get it "by hook or crook".
Kohlhaas, knowing the full value of the piece of paper, and resolved to make the Elector suffer as he had suffered, refused to give it up.

As a last resort, a street-woman who resembles a gypsy, is sent to recover the locket. Strangely enough, the old woman happens to be no other than the real gypsy who gave it to him. She informs him as to her true identity and mission, and begs him to surrender it, but he refuses.

An order comes through calling for the execution of Kohlhaas.

Amid the general confusion a note is received by Kohlhaas, from the gypsy woman, who signs herself Lisbeth, telling him that the Elector of Saxony would be at the execution block to obtain the paper after his death.

The execution scene is very dramatic, for one lawyer reads a decree awarding Kohlhaas full damages for all injury done to him and to his servant; then, on the other hand, the imperial attorney reads the proclamation calling for his execution, on charges of murder and injury to citizens.

Kohlhaas is overjoyed to think that he has finally won his suit. He is just about to step up to the execution block, with a light heart, when he sees the Elector of Saxony, disguised, as he had been forewarned by the gypsy woman. This sight irritated him so that he took the piece of paper from the locket and swallowed it, causing the Elector to faint.

The miserable man now felt that his task was completed, and he turned toward the scaffold where his head fell under the axe
of the executioner.

Here ends the story of Kohlhaas. Amid the general lamentations of the people, his body was placed in a coffin and borne away for a decent burial.
IV

Comparison of Books

A. Action

The method which Kleist adopted and developed with a force and originality in Kohlhaas, can be found in Goethe's Götzt. It is the development of the action through a form closely approaching the dramatic. A careful analysis of Kleist's tale reveals a structure compactly and logically built up from initial incident to climax and catastrophe. Kohlhaas can be easily divided into five acts:* Act I contains, after the program-like introductory paragraph, the initial action of the young lord's illegal detention of the horses, and closes with the examination of Herse, and the determination of Kohlhaas to obtain legal redress. Act II shows Kohlhaas's vain attempts to secure justice. These rise in regular climax, and culminate in his determination upon personal satisfaction.

Act III represents the culmination of Kohlhaas's power. He defeats first fifty, then one hundred and fifty, then five hundred men in pitched battle, and the Elector is about to raise a regiment against him when Luther intervenes. Act IV begins with his surrender to the authorities, and closes with the unfavorable turn brought about by the scene with the horses. Act V includes the catastrophe.

In Kohlhaas we note many points of resemblance in action to Götzt. Both Götzt and Kohlhaas were wronged by the privileged class--Götzt by the Bishop of Bamberg, who captured his page and held him prisoner; Kohlhaas by the Squire Wenzel Tronka, who mistreated his horses and servant. The plea for justice was the next step. Götzt *Gaudig, H. "Auf deutschen Lesebrüchern".
asked the Bishop to release his innocent page. Kohlhaas petitioned for redress. Since justice was denied them, they took matters into their own hands. Gütz prepared to capture Weislingen, the right-hand man of the Bishop, while Kohlhaas set out to crush Squire Wenzel. Both enjoyed a continued stroke of victory, but were finally captured, and released on taking the oath of "Urfehde". As the peasants deceived Gütz into taking up arms again, so Kohlhaas's confederate, Nagelschmidt, attempted by deceptive means to induce Kohlhaas to join him.
Both Gotz von Berlichingen and Michael Kohlhaas lived during the 16th century. Previous to this period, every German noble holding a fief from the Emperor exercised on his estate a sovereignty equal to the imperial authority alone. Thus from the princes and prelates possessed of extensive territories, down to the free knight and barons, each was a petty monarch upon his own property, independent of all control but the remote supremacy of the Emperor.

The most coveted right granted them by the Emperor was that of waging war against each other by their own private authority. This privilege was considered most precious to such militant people. These private wars were called "feuds", and the privilege of carrying them on was called "Faustrecht". As the civilization of the empire became more complex, the evils attending the feuds became more and more conspicuous. In time, the castle of every baron became a fortress from which, as his passion or avatice dictated, went forth a band of plunderers to back his quarrel, or to collect an extorted revenue from the merchants who presumed to pass through his domain. At length whole bands of these free-booting nobles used to league together for the purpose of mutual defense against their more powerful neighbors. Excursions were also made against the princes, free towns and ecclesiastic states of the empire, whose wealth tempted the needy barons to exercise against them their privilege of waging war. This independence was recognized by special edicts.

In 1495 a famous law was passed which abolished the right of private warfare, and which established an imperial court of justice. This law was not too rigidly enforced, due to the weakness of the
Emperor, and we find that, although the free knights were oppressed by the princes and ecclesiastical authorities, they continued carrying on feuds.

It is this unlawful privilege which both Götz and Kohlhaas seized upon to obtain redress. The themes of both Goethe's drama and Kleist's novel hinge upon this illegal act. Thus we find that Götz is having a private war with the Bishop of Bamberg, who has captured his page.

In Kohlhaas the horsedealer gives notice that he is at war with the Squire Wenzel Tronka, and that anyone who helps the latter would be his enemy.

As part of this private warfare, Götz and Selbitz fall upon two merchants of Nuremberg that are being escorted by the Bishop's men. Götz attacks them and makes off with their wares. This attack on constituents of an enemy was considered, in previous years, as a legitimate feature of the feud.

Likewise, Kohlhaas, having been thwarted by the citizens of Wittenberg who refused to surrender the Squire, attacks and plunder the city.

The aid of confederates figures prominently in both themes. When Sickingen is promised the hand of Maria, he offers to send Götz timely aid. Later, when Götz is being tried before the imperial tribunal, Sickingen enters the city with his troops and rescues Götz under threat of burning the city. In another critical incident, Selbitz comes to the aid of Götz as the latter is being surrounded by imperial troops.

In Kohlhaas we find that the horsedealer's ranks are con-
tinually replenished by friends and sympathizers.

We can grasp from both themes the attitude of the clergy toward private warfare. The Bishop of Bamberg is very much opposed to the free knight's means of obtaining justice. From time to time he makes peace with Götz. His opposition is based on selfish reasons.

In Kohlhaas Dr. Luther, for humanitarian reasons, makes a personal plea for the horsedealer to terminate his plundering and ravaging.

The higher virtues of both Götz and Kohlhaas are brought out. Brother Martin arrives at Götz's castle (Act I scene III, p. 8). He is most cordially welcomed by Götz who says: "Ehrwürdiger Vater, guten Abend! Woher so spät? Mann der heiligen Ruhe, ihr beschämmt viel Ritter." Through Götz's courteous treatment of the monk, Goethe brings out a noble quality in an apparent outlaw.

Kleist, likewise, shows, through Kohlhaas's talk with Luther, that the horsedealer, although a marauder, has a high sense of respect for the man of God.

The regard for loyalty figures prominently in Götz's action in bringing war against the Bishop of Bamberg for the recovery of his page as it does in Kohlhaas's repeated demands that the mother of Herse be compensated for the damage done to her son.

The theme of Goethe's drama was influenced by "knightly word". Contrary to what might be expected, Götz, after his capture, was not confined in chains in some dark prison, but was allowed to remain in his castle. It is because of this liberty that Götz was able to join the insurgents.
This same chivalry toward prisoners is seen in Kohlhaas. When the horsedealer was taken prisoner, he was lodged in a house by the prince of Meissen who told his soldiers that the man was free, and that they were there simply to protect him when he went out.
C. Lerse and Herse

Lerse, who appears in Götz von Berlichingen as a valiant and faithful companion of Götz, recalls to us Lerse, a friend of Goethe's, whom the latter met at the University of Strassburg.

He is introduced in the story (Act III, scene VII) when he comes to offer his services to Götz. From the conversation we gather that Lerse encountered Götz in battle, sometime before, and highly impressed by his courage and bravery, had come to fight for him. By his refusal to accept pay, Lerse shows the sincerity of his intentions. This impression is stamped on us, and is recalled in all his deeds. Lerse represents in Götz the ideal loyal servant.

This trait of loyalty is likewise well exemplified by Kleist's Herse. Herse, the servant of Kohlhaas, is first pictured to us as having been wounded and beaten in the services of his master.

When Götz is about to join the peasants in their war (p.90), he asks Lerse to remain with his wife. The following conversation between Lerse and Elizabeth serves to better illustrate Lerse's faithfulness.*

Lerse—"Tröstet Euch, gnädige Frau!"

Eliz.—"Ach Lerse, die Tränen stunden ihm in den Augen, wie er Abschied von mir nahm. Es ist grausam, grausam!"

Lerse—"Er wird zurückkehren."

Lerse—"Ein so edler Mann."

When Maria goes to Weislingen to beg mercy for her brother, she takes Lerse along as a companion.

*Act V, scene IV, p. 115 Götz von Berlichingen
As for Kleist's Herse, the incident of his beating at Squire Wenzel Tronka's castle is sufficient to illustrate his loyalty.

It seems obvious that Kleist, seeking to create a loyal servant and companion modeled his "Herse" after Goethe's "Lerse". At least, we know that Goethe had a justification for using this character while Kleist, on the other hand, had no source to draw on but the profound impression made on him by Goethe's "Lerse".

D. Elizabeth and Lizbeth

Both Goethe's Elizabeth and that of Kleist are lovely feminine souls. They are brave, generous, good-hearted and symbolic of ideal wives. It does not surprise us at all that Kleist, in quest for an ideal mate for the horseseller, drew upon Goethe's character.

The bravery and courage of Goethe's Elizabeth is all the greater when contrasted with that of Maria:

Eliz.--"Ich kann nicht begreifen, wo mein Herr bleibt. Schon
Fünf Tag' und Nacht' und dass er weg ist, und er hoffte so bald seinen Streich auszuführen."

Maria--"Mich ängstigt's lang. Wenn ich so einen Mann haben sollte, der sich immer Gefahren aussetzte, ich stürbe im ersten Jahr."

Eliz.--"Dafür dank ich Gott, dass er mich härter zusammengesetzt hat."

Goethe's Elizabeth shows on numerous occasions the goodness of her soul. She tells her son Karl (p. 15) how his father went out to help the tailor recover the prize which he rightfully won in the archery contest, and ends by asking: "Wärest du nicht auch ausgeritten?"

Her devotion to her husband is extraordinary. When all the wine is apparently used up,* Elizabeth appears with a bottle and says to her husband: "ich hab' sie für dich beiseite gesetzt." At his end, she is ever present to make him comfortable. She does not torment him for having gone down to defeat, but is profoundly sympathetic toward him.

Combined with such good qualities, it is but natural that respect and fear of the Lord should be present. Such is the case with Goethe's Elizabeth:**

Eliz.—"Lieber Mann, schilt unsern himmlischen Vater nicht."

Kleist's Lisbeth does not continue far into the story for, unfortunately, she meets a tragic end. Contrary to her husband's wishes, who desires her to go to Schwerin with the children, she sets out on a dangerous undertaking, namely, to deliver the petition of her husband in Berlin. She is borne home in a dying condition. Shortly before her death, she recovered consciousness. A minister was standing beside her bed, reading a chapter of the Bible. Suddenly she took the Bible from his hands, turned over the leaves and seemed to be searching for some special passage. At last she found it, and putting her finger on it, she pointed it out to her husband; the following verse: "Forgive your enemies, do good to them that hate you." This incident shows that Kleist's Lisbeth had a respect and fear of the Almighty, such as had Goethe's character.

Her desire to do good for others is brought out by her statement that she would manage to get together enough money to pay the expense of the law-suit since other travelers, less patient

*Act III, scene II, p. 87 Götz von Berlichingen
**Act III, scene II, p. 93 Götz von Berlichingen
than he, would pass by the castle, and it was doing God's work to put a stop to disorders such as these.

We know that Goethe's mother's name was Elizabeth. In Hermann und Dorothea he gave the name of Elizabeth to the mother of Hermann. In this act we see a desire and attempt on the part of Goethe to extoll the noble virtues of his mother.

With Kleist, nothing in his life or works indicates that his Lisbeth, with the same kindly and moral attributes as possessed by Goethe's own mother, Hermann's mother, and Gotz's wife, was inspired by any other source than that of Elizabeth in Götz von Berlichingen.

E. The Two Olearius'

Olearius appears in Götz von Berlichingen as a learned jurist, a doctor of laws from Bologna. From his discussion with the Bishop of Bamberg, Liebtraut, and others, we gather that he comes from Frankfort-on-Main and has changed his family name from Ölmann to Olearius in order to avoid impropriety in the titles of his Latin writings. Although he is a minor character in Götz, he represents a learned man of the age.

It is the same learned qualities that stamp Kleist's "Olearius". Kleist tells us that the Elector of Saxony, disturbed by the contents of the mysterious paper, consults two astrologers, Oldenholm and Olearius by name, who at that time enjoyed a great reputation in Saxony.

It is quite apparent that it is more than a coincidence that Kleist chose the name of Olearius for his astrologer, whom he wished
to represent as a learned man.

F. Sickingen and Nagelschmidt

Sickingen first appears in *Gütz von Berlichingen* as a suitor for the hand of Maria. She accepts him as does her brother. In the same scene Gütz goes to Sickingen and tells the latter that the Kaiser had ordered his arrest. Immediately Sickingen offers his aid to Gütz who, not wishing to draw his future brother-in-law into the dispute, rejects the offer. Sickingen, however, assures him that he will send timely aid. Later in the story, as Gütz is being abused before the commissioners of the imperial council, Sickingen arrives and, under threat of burning the city, secure the release of Gütz.

In contrast with this faithful confederate, we have Kleist's Nagelschmidt, who was the lieutenant of Michael Kohlhaas. He was a good-for-nothing fellow, who called himself a vicegerent of Kohlhaas. This he did partly to inspire with fear the officers of the law, and partly to influence the country people to help him. He circulated news that he was plundering merely to support and lend security to his oppressed master. This he did in order to burn and plunder with greater impunity.

When the news of his plundering reached Dresden, it was seized upon by the enemies of Kohlhaas to show that a mistake had been made in granting him amnesty. Kohlhaas was summoned by Prince Christiern von Meissen to explain the doings of his "representative". Kohlhaas protested his innocence, and wrote a letter to Nagelschmidt in which he declared that the latter's pretense of having taken to arms in order to maintain the amnesty which had been violated, was a
"disgraceful and vicious fabrication".

Nagelschmidt, once more, attempts to form an alliance with Kohlhaas. He sends him a letter by means of a messenger who falls sick. The letter is found by the authorities, and pressure is brought to bear that Kohlhaas should be arrested without delay and brought to trial on the charge of secret complicity with Nagelschmidt.

It is quite probable that Kleist, when characterizing Nagelschmidt, had in mind Sickingen, but, anxious to make the Kohlhaas tale even more tragic, he purposely painted Kohlhaas's confederate as unscrupulous, unfaithful, and untrustworthy.
Summary

Glancing back over the way we have come, we find as definite results from the analysis of the two books: (1) the actions, which take place about the same time, have almost parallel steps; (2) the themes, in which God-fearing men are wronged and take it upon themselves to secure justice, are very closely related; (3) the characters, who play like parts, bear similar names; (4) the concentration of interest on the characters is prominent in both books.

It has been mentioned that Kohlhaas could just as well have been a drama. The dramatic treatment which Kleist employs does not moralize nor reflect upon the deeds or sentiments of the characters. As in Gotz, we learn of the character's feelings only through their own words, actions, and looks. We are left to form our own conclusions as to the ethical value of their deeds. Thus the thrilling scene between Kohlhaas and Luther is recorded with the precision and terseness of a chronicler. The life and passion which throb beneath the surface are not elucidated by the author, who does not use any description to portray the feeling.

The concentration on the heroes is prominent in both actions. Götz seeks to capture Weislingen as a means of retaliation. We notice his kind treatment of brother Martin. We observe his efforts to win Weislingen back. At the Bishop's court the whole action centers around capturing Götz. We hear of his attack on the Nuremberg Merchants. We see him before the imperial councillors, and his release at the hands of Sickingen. We observe his retirement under oath. Soon he joins the peasants, and is forced to flee. Finally he is
captured and retired under oath.

In Kohlhaas the hero never leaves the stage, and we learn of what happens in his absence only as he himself hears about it. With him we see the true condition of the horses and are left to conjecture the true state of the case until he hears it through Herse. We see him prepare his accusation, and patiently prepare a reply. With him we hear of the futility of his efforts and are obliged to content ourselves with the half-explanations and torturing uncertainties that take the zest out of life. The adventure of Lisbeth at court is treated the same way. Only the rumors that Kohlhaas hears from the returning servants, and her sad condition when she is given back to him are made known to us. The disappearance of the young lord at the sacking of Tronkenberg is unexplained until Kohlhaas hears it from Herse. In the second part of the story more scope is given to the counterplay, but the figure of Kohlhaas at all times overshadows the stage. The description of Junker Wenzel, after he has felt the avenging hand of the man whom he had wronged in his wanton ignorance, is the most convincing proof of the might of the hero. The same is true of the council scene in which the fear of Kohlhaas serves to bring out with fine dramatic art the characters of those present.

We see that Kleist followed in Goethe's footsteps in two important points of his narrative technique: in objectivity of treatment, and in interest of characters. But, however far Kleist remained behind Goethe in breadth of view and aesthetic polish, he surpassed him in sweep of passion and onward rush of action.
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Fishman, William

A comparison of Goethe's "Gotz von Berlichingen" with Kiepert's "Michail Kohlaas"

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