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THE LITERARY TEXT AS PERFORMATIVE PROPHECY.

REREADING HISTORY IN KLEIST'S *MICHAEL KOHLHAAS* AND SHELLEY'S *THE MASK OF ANARCHY*.

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I shall conquer untruth by truth.
And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering.
Mohandas Gandhi

One has a moral responsability to disboey unjust laws.
Martin L. King

Justice will not be served until
those who are unaffected are as outraged
as those who are.
Benjamin Franklin

Abstract

One of literature's strengths when contributing to social change lays in its ability to defy official narratives and offer new readings of history –be it past or contemporary– that foreground certain features usually neglected by official recounts. As such, well-established events can be presented in a new light and turned into moral examples which may encourage and lay down an alternative path for present struggles, thus eventually changing the future. The following essay intends to research this potential performativity of the literary text focusing on Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* and Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*, both written in the context of social struggle during the first two decades of the 19th century. These two works will be analysed and contrasted, with the support provided by Kleist's *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden* and Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*, so as to see how literature's mechanisms of performativity unfold through both content and form.

Keywords: *Heinrich von Kleist, Michael Kohlhaas, Percy Byshee Shelley, The Mask of Anarchy, Literature's performativity*

Abstract

Quan es tracta de contribuir al canvi social una de les principals virtuts de la literatura rau en la seva capacitat de desafiar la narratologia oficial i oferir noves lectures de la història (passada o present), en les quals es prioritzin aspectes sovint negligits pels relats oficials. Així, esdeveniments la interpretació dels quals es considerava tancada poden revisar-se i contemplar-se des d'una perspectiva diferent, fins al punt d'esdevenir exemples morals que donin alè i obrin camins alternatius a la lluita social present, conseqüentment alterant el futur. L'objectiu del treball present és examinar i investigar aquesta capacitat performativa del text literari en dues obres la creació de les quals s'emmarca en el context de lluita social que marcà les dues primeres dècades del s. XIX: *Michael Kohlhaas* de Kleist i *The Mask of Anarchy* de Shelley. L'anàlisi i la comparació d'ambdós textos (sempre amb l'ajuda proporcionada per Kleist a *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden* i per Shelley a *A Defense of Poetry*) permetrà observar com la literatura desplega, a través del contingut i la forma, els mecanismes de la pròpia performativitat.

Paraules claus: *Heinrich von Kleist, Michael Kohlhaas, Percy Byshee Shelley, The Mask of Anarchy, Performativitat de la literatura*

Zussamenfassung

Eine der Stärken der Literatur, wenn es um ihren Beitrag zum gesellschaftlichen Wandel geht, liegt in ihrer Fähigkeit, offizielle Erzählungen herauszufordern, und neue Geschichtsdeutungen –sei es von der Vergangenheit oder von der Gegenwartszeit- anzubieten, die bestimmte, von offiziellen Berichten oft vernachlässigte Merkmale hervorheben. So können etablierte Ereignisse unter einem neuen Licht betrachtet und in moralische Vorbilder verwandelt werden, um gegenwärtigen Wandel zu ermutigen, und einen alternativen Weg zu fördern, sodass die Zukunft verändert wird. Die vorliegende Bachelorarbeit beabsichtigt, die potenzielle Performativität des literarischen Textes zu erforschern, mit dem Schwerpunkt auf zwei Werken, die im Kontext des gesellschaftlichen Wandels in den ersten zwei Jahrzehnten des 19. Jahrhunderts geschrieben wurden: *Michael Kohlhaas*, von Kleist, und *The Mask of Anarchy*, von Shelley. Kleists *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden* und Shelleys *A Defense of Poetry* jeweils als Stützen benutzend, werden *Michael Kohlhaas* und *The Mask of Anarchy* kontrastiv analysiert, um festzustellen, wie sich die Mechanismen von Performativität durch Inhalt und Form des literarischen Textes entfalten.

Schlüsselwörter: *Heinrich von Kleist, Michael Kohlhaas, Percy Byshee Shelley, The Mask of Anarchy, Performativität von Literatur*

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INDEX

1. ON SOCIAL STRUGGLE, MORAL SUPERIORITY AND THE POWER OF POETICS

"Right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."[1] If this assertion by Thucydides is among his most famous it is probably because it puts the finger on the sore spot. As it happens to be, history all but too often looks like an endless string of calamities suffered by the most destitute and defenceless. And unfortunately, a scandalous amount of those calamities are the doing of the powerful. Consequently, the tension between legal law, decreed by political power, and moral law, driven by the legitimacy of what is deemed to be fair, has a rather long tradition and has been at the starting point of many riots, revolts and revolutions populating universal history. As I see it, it has arguably given birth to yet another archetype of popular imagination, the lawful outlaw, and to a rather particular strategy to denounce unfair laws, passive resistance or civil disobedience. When examining this two concepts, what I find particularly interesting is how they both share the same underlying idea, namely, that whenever legal law does not lead to social justice, it is right to disobey it and act in accordance with a morally superior law, regardless of the consequences this might bring upon.

Considering this, it can be but surprising to realise that both the notion of a lawful outlaw and of civil disobedience bloomed to their fullest at the same time, that is, during the first half of the 19th century. Lawful outlaws had certainly existed before (the *Rhymes of Robin Hood* date back to c. 1377), but it was at the beginning of the 19th century that they came to age through literature. Starting with *Michael Kohlhaas* (1808) by Heinrich von Kleist, the tradition carried out with *Ivanhoe* (1819) by Walter Scott; it followed with *The Captain's Daughter* (1836, allegedly featuring not one, but two lawful outlaws, Pyotr and Pugachev) by Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, who in 1841 tried to further explore –unsuccessfully– this archetype in *Dubrovsky*. As the century marched on the lawful outlaw mingled itself with other archetypes, as can arguably be seen in *The Three Musketeers* (1844) by Alexandre Dumas, in Captain Nemo from *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) by Jules Verne, or *Kidnapped* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson. Further from dying with the turn of the century, the lawful outlaw kept on thriving in literature, for example, with the series of *The Black Corsair*

[1] Crawley, Richard (1910) Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian* War, London: J.M. Dent. E. P. Dutton, New York. Book V, Chapter 89, Section 1.

(beginning in 1898) by Emilio Salgari, and it even made its way into cinema, not only with the adaptations of the aforementioned works but also with films like *Spartacus* (1960), *Zorro* (1975) and even blockbusters such as *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009).

For its part, the idea of civil disobedience or passive resistance is generally considered to have been firstly stated in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819). Henry David Thoreau read the poem[2] and took a version up in his essay *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849). Later renamed *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, this work has come to be regarded as the philosophical foundation for passive resistance and civil disobedience. Indeed, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy read and took inspiration from Thoreau's essay when writing *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1894), the founding text of the Tolstoyan movement where he advocates for nonviolent resistance based on the example of Jesus Christ. Mohandas Gandhi, with whom Tolstoy had an epistolary friendship from 1908 until his own death, claimed that Tolstoy's book impressed him greatly[3]. He also read and praised Thoreau's essay and would frequently recite *The Mask of Anarchy.*[4] In his autobiography Martin Luther King, Jr. too stated that as a student he repeatedly read *On Civil Disobedience*, fascinated by its ideas. In short, to name but a few examples, ever since Shelley suggested it as a means to fight injustice, nonviolent civil resistance has been used in India's campaign for independence, in Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution, in East Germany's demonstrations to oust the communist government, in South Africa to fight the apartheid, in the USA during the American Civil Rights Movement, in the Baltic Countries' Singing Revolution, in Georgia's Rose Revolution, Ukraine's Orange Revolution, or during the Arab Spring.

I believe that the reason why the concepts of the lawful outlaw and civil disobedience blossomed at the beginning of the 19th century can be found in the historical and philosophical context of the time. In their quest for obtaining, or even extracting, political and social justice from authorities both ideas drink from the underlying postulates of the American and French Revolutions; people can and must take action against unfair government whenever the later resists giving in to fair demands. In the case of the lawful outlaw, this pairs up with the relevance Romanticism attached to the individual, both in the political (his status as a citizen, thus able to discern for himself what is right and what is wrong, and act upon it) and ontological

[2] Duerksen (1988: p. 89)
[3] Gandhi (2006: Part II, chapter 15)
[4] Weber (2004: p.48)

sense (his singularity as a unique entity –thus perpetually at conflict with the rest of the world– capable of equally unique feats and deeds). For its part, nonviolent civil resistance can be easily seen as the result of defending the need to rebel against unfair circumstances while adding in the traumatic experience of the French Revolution and other riots and violent demonstrations that took place at that time. As was often the case, violently expressed popular demands usually lead to a considerable bloodshed and impoverishment that eventually proved ineffectual in the long term.

Nevertheless, rather than the reasons why these two ideas came to life during the romantic period, what I find truly fascinating and what shall I be focusing my essay on is the reason why the concepts of the lawful outlaw and nonviolent civil resistance came fully to life in literature. Consequently, I shall undertake a detailed analysis of *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* (the pioneering works for the lawful outlaw and nonviolent resistance respectively) in order to see how Kleist and Shelley used literature to its fullest potential to create, explore and promote these two expressions –one individual, the other collective – of a 'law above law'. It is my aim to demonstrate how both authors, when reflecting upon social struggle, saw the need to: firstly foster social struggle by clearly emphasising that, despite whatever reverses the populace might have suffered, the legitimacy of their struggle was never to be doubted; and secondly, suggest that the course of action should shift from violent revolutions to passive resistance, for a firm but nonviolent opposition to unfairness would give the cause a moral upper hand, or in other words, a moral superiority that would eventually translate into victory. As I hope to prove, both authors deemed necessary to establish a precedent, to offer future generations a tangible example –that is to say, a somewhat 'realistic' example– of passive resistance triumphing over its enemies. As will be discussed, to that end Kleist and Shelley revisited an historical event (by drawing inspiration from it or making direct reference to it) in order to posit a different reading of it, more in accordance with their interests.

With the help of *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden* by Kleist, and *A Defense of Poetry* by Shelley, together with secondary literature, I shall put forward a descriptive analysis of both the form and content of *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy,* with which I hope to demonstrate how Kleist and Shelley thought the language of poetics and the literary text to be not only truly performative but the most performative yet, since only poetics –and

not philosophy, political theory or historiography– could manage to offer an alternative reading of history while simultaneously proving that reading to be the one containing the actual truth. Consequently, as will be discussed, literature's greatest contribution to social struggle would precisely lay in the performative ability of poetics, the only human language capable of changing our perception of the past, thus altering our present and, potentially, our future.

2. POETICS' MORAL REFERENTS I: THE INDIVIDUAL EXAMPLE OF *MICHAEL KOHLHAAS*

Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* has given cause to many readings, some of them in direct opposition to one another. Much has been debated about whether Kohlhaas should be regarded as the first terrorist in literature, or rather, as the first lawful outlaw. Some scholars (Champlin, 2012; Miller, 1992) believe the *Erzählung* to stand for the complete breakdown of all established limits, be them social (citizens must abide the law), rational (law must always be impartial to be fair), or stylistic (a credible narration excludes the supernatural). Others (Landwehr, 1992; Zachary, 2010), however, think exactly the opposite, and view *Michael Kohlhaas* as proof of the impossibility to overcome the established limits, as the retelling of how any attempt to break them is bound to fail. I will argue that indeed, *Michael Kohlhaas* shows how it is impossible to overcome certain limits by using the same tools employed to define and establish them. And yet, Kleist managed nonetheless to offer an alternative way which 'does free us' from such ties, not by breaking them but by situating ourselves beyond them, thus hollowing out their power to affect us. In that sense, Kleist's retelling of the rebellion of Hans Kohlhase offers a new take on history which presents Kohlhaas as a paradigmatic example of how individuals can prevail among their enemies, namely, above the ambassadors of the "allgemeine […] Not der Welt".[5]

2. 1. The collapsing world and *word* of *Michael Kohlhaas*

In *Michael Kohlhaas* all hell breaks loose when the law fails to meet Kohlhaas' fair demands. Hence, it can be said that the source of conflict in the *Erzählung* is the unreliability of the written law. Indeed, the word 'as an ordering force' is seriously questioned: as Landwehr

[5] From now onwards all references to Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* will be cited as [MK, p. 21, l. 34]

notes (1992: p. 436) the written laws fail to grant Kohlhaas his rights; similarly Kohlhaas' mandates –which could establish a new set of laws, of a more universal reach by each newly issued mandate– actually fail to do so, since not only do they never achieve their intended purpose (capturing the Junker von Tronka) but more importantly, they always result in an unexpected violence, never the predictable outcome of their strict observance (Champlin, 2012: pp. 441-447). Simultaneously, the word 'as a descriptive force' is also held under a question mark in *Michael Kohlhaas*. To begin with, the narrator of the story appears to be an unreliable source who leaves information to be guessed[6] when not flatly omitting it[7]. To make matters worse, the whole text's credibility as a novelization of an historical occurrence is endangered by the stylistic break of the magical, fairy-tale-like gypsy's episode. Finally, the very chronicles providing the historical anecdote are to be mistrusted[8], or at least so states our unreliable narrator. Thus, in *Michael Kohlhaas* both the power of the word 'as law' and 'as narration' implodes in concentric circles: if Kohlhaas' private laws (his mandates) are ineffectual, so are the universal laws governing the State of Saxony and Brandenburg. In the same way, the reader is faced with an unreliable narrator narrating an inconsistent story based on unreliable historical sources. All this amounts to what Landwehr (1992: p. 432) succinctly sums up as the impossibility of human rationality (expressed through language) to successfully master reality.

Zachary (2010: p. 174) elaborates further by pointing out that the problem is not an intrinsic inability of rationality to order and describe the world, but rather its reliance on a treacherous medium. As is the case, both the word as law and the word as narration in *Michael Kohlhaas* lose effectivity because they are systematically distorted by a third mediating party. This can be found between Kohlhaas and the Junker, Kohlhaas and the institutions of justice, the reader and the story, the story's aesthetics and its message, or historians and history. As a matter of fact, Luther alludes to this unreliable medium when he condemns Kohlhaas for taking justice in his own hands; Kohlhaas' claim that he has been denied the state law's protection,

[6] For instance, when discussing why Kohlhaas has chosen to leave Dresden for a short period of time, the narrator mentions some possible motives before finally admitting that, with regards to this decision, "[...] zu welchem vielleicht auch noch Gründe anderer Art mitwirkten, die wir jedem, der in seiner Brust Bescheid weiß, zu erraten überlassen wollen." [MK, p. 104, ll. 22-25]

[7] In regards to why Poland was at war with Saxony, all the narrator has to say is that "[...] um welchen Gegenstandes willen wissen wir nicht […]". [MK, p.113, l. 34]

[8] "Wohin er eigentlich ging, und ob er sich nach Dessau wandte, lassen wir dahin gestellt sein, indem die Chroniken, aus deren Vergleichung wir Bericht erstatten, an dieser Stelle, auf befremdende Weise, einander widersprechen und aufheben." [MK, p.137, l. 37 – p. 138, l. 4]

explains Luther, is false, for his appeal has failed to reach the emperor. Interestingly, as Miller (1992: p. 308) remarks, this problem is not only thematised in *Michael Kohlhaas*, but can also be found in many other Kleist's works[9], where the characters suffer the consequences of what is being said about them or for them, what appears to be or is thought to be the right and logical string of events.

According to Zachary (2010: p. 172), the most palpable consequence of the employment of this treacherous medium (also to be found repeatedly in the majority of Kleist's works) is the breaking out of episodes of remarkable violence. As he argues, the use of a medium which does not deliver the expected results leads to a situation of 'middleness', of being stuck somewhere halfway, thus initiating a mad escalation of tension resulting from the impossibility of conclusion. More specifically, according to Champlin (2012: pp. 439-445), this state of 'middleness' would be reflected in *Michael Kohlhaas* as the always dangerous disruption of power which occurs when the ruling authority is questioned without being replaced either by its opponents or by a legitimate successor. Quite rightly, what at first sight Kleist seems to present in *Michael Kohlhaas* is the breakdown of a state's power whose 'auctoritas' is hollowed out by its inability to enforce impartial and universal laws. By having Kohlhaas to rebel against this state without being able to offer an acceptable alternative, Kleist would be signalling the limits of human rationality when it comes to a universal, ideal principle (namely, justice) that must be individual and practical in its implementation. Needless to say, this is a well-liked interpretation among scholars, given the easiness with which it can be linked to Kleist's infamous 'Kantkrise'[10].

[9] *Die Marquise von O* constitutes, for instance, a great example, inasmuch as the Marquise's claims of innocence are hard to believe when confronted with what is known to be the natural course of events for a woman to become pregnant. Again, in *Der Zweikampf* the honour of Littegarda is put in doubt since the course of the events seem to align with those accusing her and contradict her own word. Similarly, in *Das Erdbeben in Chili* the leading pair of lovers dies at the hands of a frenzied mob, who think they are to blame for the earthquake. To make matters worse, the circumstances have unfold in such a way that not only have the mob real difficulties in establishing who are the two lovers who should be killed, but moreover, in the confusion that violence unleashes, Don Fernando's baby is killed when someone takes him for the offspring of the two ill-fated lovers.

[10] After leaving his military career (to which he was obliged as the son of a noblemen) in 1799 Kleist sought to educate himself extensively, and to such an end he attended, among others, Mathematics, Physics, Cultural History, Natural Law and Latin lectures at Brandenburg's University. However, as stated in his letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge on the 5th February of 1801, the reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgement,* where the ontological limits of reason are discussed, made him abandon his self-traced plan for education in complete dejection, since truth could never be reached. It must be noticed, though, that scholars have argued at length about whether the so-called *Kantkrise* was so traumatic an experience as it appears to be in his own letter, or whether it was rather the excuse needed to abandon university and pursue a literary career.

However, the ending of *Michael Kohlhaas* does not entail a complete defeat. That Kohlhaas is defeated cannot be doubted given that he dies. And yet, he certainly prevails among his enemies. Considering this, to claim that *Michael Kohlhaas* is simply Kleist's exploration of the limits of rational law would imply a very limited reading of the novel, focusing on just one side of it. For if in *Michael Kohlhaas* the limits of the word as rationality are made clear by exposing how it is subjugated to the perverting effects of human irrational behaviour, the power of the word as a path leading to the ineffable, to that dimension of human existence that is not, like rationality, 'outside' human reality but 'beyond' it, is also foregrounded. Furthermore, it is shown to be the necessary alternative strategy that eventually allows Michael Kohlhaas to go down in history not as the leader of a failed rebellion, but rather, as somebody who defeated his enemies. As it will be seen, in *Michael Kohlhaas* Kleist exemplifies the workings of this alternative solution (triggered by virtue), while at the same time making it distinctively clear that, to that end, we must rely not on the falsely precise, impartial, fact-displaying language of historiography, but on the suggestive, essence-grasping language of literature. Unlike history, poetics is the medium that not only allows us to see what the rebellion of Michael Kohlhaas was all truly about, but also establishes a link between the figure of Kohlhaas and our reality by showing us that his struggle does not constitute yet another isolated event in history, but a great example for all to follow.

2. 2. The elusive acknowledgement of the individual's dignity in *Michael Kohlhaas*

At first sight, it seems simple to determine why Kohlhaas rebels against the state: on his way to Saxony to sell his horses he is arbitrarily detained by the Junker von Tronka and his minions. They make use of a fictive new pass to retain as payment two of Kohlhaas' horses, which are then exploited to near dead. When the state's laws –corrupted by personal and political relationships – fail to compensate Kohlhaas for the mistreatment he has endured, he decides to take justice in his own hands. It would then appear that the whole plot revolves around a pair of black horses. Nevertheless, a close reading will prove that the situation is not that simple, for the narrator tells us that Kohlhaas would have felt equally wronged had he been stolen a pair of dogs[11]. Landwehr (1992: p. 432) draws close to the solution when she points

[11] "[...] er hätte gleichen Schmerz empfunden, wenn es ein Paar Hunde gegolten hätte [...]. [MK, p. 46, ll. 2-3]

out that what Kohlhaas actually seeks is not to be compensated for the wrong he suffered, but rather, to be heard, to be granted a voice (hence why Kohlhaas stops his violent rebellion as soon as somebody –Martin Luther– accepts to listen to his version of the events). As I see it, Landwehr fails nonetheless to take her own idea to conclusion: as soon as Michael Kohlhaas would have been granted that voice, he would have felt compensated. For indeed what matters to him is not literally a pair of horses, but what the stealing of those two horses stands for, namely, the most absolute contempt for his dignity as an individual subject. That is the reason why, as Miller (1992: p. 311] states, Kohlhaas insists on not only being given back his horses, but more relevantly, being returned *those* horses in *that* state. Put in other words, he does not want to straighten a situation gone awry; he wants to revert time and return to the initial state of things, that is, to that moment when his honour had not yet being tarnished.

The identification of Kohlhaas' individual dignity with the two stolen horses allows for a better understanding of their evolution throughout the *Erzählung*. It suddenly ceases to be a fantastical phenomenon and becomes the symbolic indicator of the state of Kohlhaas' dignity. So, at the very beginning the two black horses are impressive exemplars, as much the model of what a healthy horse must be as Kohlhaas is the epitome of the pious, law-abiding, citizen. When Kohlhaas returns to pick them up, after having been subjected to the humiliation of being compelled to bow down to a non-existing law designed to simply rob him, the two horses have become "das wahre Bild des Elends im Tierreiche!"[12] When Kohlhaas, in a state of absolute madness, begins his violent campaign to catch the Junker, thus inflicting terror to innocent victims who have nothing to do with the whole affair whatsoever, the horses get "[…] gänzlich verschollenen […]"[13]; Kohlhaas' dignity has disappeared together with his humanity. Later on, thanks to Luther's intervention, Kohlhaas is reinserted in civilization and willing to negotiate a solution. At that point, when discussing whether Kohlhaas' case can be amended, the Count of Kallheim states that the possibility of founding the troublesome horses and bringing them back to their initial condition is non-existent: "[…] sie *sind* tot: sind in staatsrechtlicher Bedeutung tot, weil sie keinen Wert haben, und werden es physisch sein, bevor man sie, aus der Abdeckerei in die Stalle der Ritter gebracht hat […]"[14]. Indeed, Michael Kohlhaas dignity as an individual is "dead", for the State chose to kill it when it denied it any worth; and it will

[12] [MK, p. 22, ll. 12 – 13]
[13] [MK, p.90, l. 23]
[14] [MK, p. 99, l. 35 – p. 100, l.1] Emphasis in the original unless specified.

be physically dead soon, for what everybody wants is to execute Kohlhaas. However, on the day of Kohlhaas' execution he is presented with "[…] den beiden, von Wohlsein glimmenden, die Erde mit ihrer Hufen sampfenden Rappen […]"[15], which he leaves to his sons as inheritance. At the end, then, Kohlhaas has managed to claim back his dignity, and that is his legacy to his offspring.

Before explaining how Kohlhaas has achieved such a miraculous-looking feat, it is necessary to examine the crucial shift in power-dynamics that occur in *Michael Kohlhaas*. To that end, Helga Gallas' (1981) analysis of the structure of the text is remarkably illuminating. Making use of Lacanian hermeneutical theory, Gallas identifies a clearly-cut structure unfolding throughout the novel, a structure which articulates itself around the repetition of the power-dynamics established between a character in the role of violence-enforcer, a character in the role of victim, and an object which unleashes conflict. Once examined in this way, *Michael Kohlhaas* appears to be the double occurrence of two series composed by two mirroring sequences (Gallas, 1981: pp. 70- 75), each of the four sequences amounting to roughly a quarter of the *Erzählung*:

		Violence-enforcer	**Victim**	**Object**
Series 1	Sequence 1: *Realm of rational law*	Junker	Kohlhaas	Horses
	Sequence 2 *(repetition)*: *Realm of irrational law*	Kohlhaas	Junker	Horses
	Martin	Luther's	Intervention	
Series 2	Sequence 1: *Realm of rational law*	Elector	Kohlhaas	Prophecy
	Sequence 2 *(repetition): Realm of irrational law*	Kohlhaas	Elector	Prophecy

Translated and adapted from Gallas (1981: p. 70)

As it can be seen, the story begins with the Junker attacking Kohlhaas on grounds of his horses, or as it has already been established, attacking Kohlhaas' dignity as an individual.

[15] [MK, p. 140, ll. 2 – 3]

This irrational use of a rational tool (law) originates Kohlhaas' reaction, guided by a rational use (making justice) of an irrational tool (violence). The apparition of Luther puts an end to this first series by reinserting Kohlhaas in the realm of human-defined reality, in what appears to be the realm of rationality. Consequently, the story seems to start again: Kohlhaas is once more retained by the sly plotting of the authorities. Similarly as he had done when he was stopped at the river-crossing, he seeks to speak directly with the authority allegedly issuing the order, whom he finds entertaining or speaking with other people[16].

Yet this is not a mere repetition, for this time Kohlhaas' reaction is not explicit violence, but an implicit one carried out through the possession of the prophecy given to him by the gypsy. If what was at danger in the first series was Kohlhaas' dignity, in the second series it is the Elector's dignity which is to be found under threat. If in the first series this 'something' in danger –which Gallas, using Lacanian terminology names as "phallus" (1981, p. 74) – is embodied in something physical and defined (the two black horses), in the second sequence it is embodied by something undefined and intangible (a prophecy about the future of the House of Saxony). At the same time, as has been established, at the beginning of the first series the Junker von Tronka makes use of an implicit violence (the violence of a fictive law) and Kohlhaas reacts by making use of explicit violence. Again, during the second series this order is reverted: the authorities use explicit violence against Kohlhaas (house arrest and eventually death penalty), and he responds with implicit violence (the prophecy threatening the electors' lineage). What is clear then, is that after the interview with Martin Luther the object shifts from "Kohlhaas dignity" to "the authorities' (the Elector of Saxony) dignity". And that shift is what makes possible for the fourth subsequence to stop this potentially never-ending game of repetitions and conclude *Michael Kohlhaas.* How then, does this shift occur? Why does the object change, so that by the second sequence Kohlhaas' dignity is no longer endangered?

2. 3. A self-satisfied demand

In what constitutes yet another recurrent trait of Kleist's works (similar to the ever-present virulent violence), near the end of *Michael Kohlhaas* is discovered that what Kohlhaas

[16] When retained at the toll, Kohlhaas says "[...] daß er den Junker von Tronka selbst darüber sprechen würde." [MK, p. 17, l.7] Similarly, once an oficial suggests that if Kohlhaas is not happy with being constantly accompanied by guards he should go to the authorities to discuss the issue, Kohlhaas replies "[...] daß er dies tun wolle [...]" [MK, p.108, l. 18]. If the Junker von Tronka is found merrying among his peers, the Baron von Wenk is found listening to reports about Nagelschmidt.

needs to defeat his enemies has always been at his disposal, hanging from his neck. Just as the Elector of Saxony seems unable to realise, until it is too late to act upon it, that the man he is looking for is right under his nose, so happens to be the case that Kohlhaas too has had the weapon he needs to confront the authorities right under his nose during the whole novel. As is also the case, for instance, in *Die Marquise von O*, the dramatic appearance of this new piece of information forces a re-elaboration and re-arrangement of the whole string of events, which now shine under a different light. In *Michael Kohlhaas* this piece of information has been so overlooked that it is impossible to establish when exactly the encounter with the gypsy took place. Kohlhaas claims it was right the day after his wife burial, when he departed from Kohlhaasenbrück to capture the Junker. This is however contradictory with what has been narrated hitherto, given that Kohlhaas waits for an answer from the Junker in Kohlhaasenbrück for a period of three days. Nonetheless, the inaccuracy surrounding the precise date of the event does not only prove how little attention it has been paid so far, but it also signals the irruption of the completely ineffable in the novel.

What is truly inspiring is what Champlin (2012: p. 447) notices: the threatening power of the prophecy is a direct consequence of the violent and unfair attitude displayed by the authorities. This time their abusive ways backfire, given that now they do not deal with a mere human horse dealer, but rather, with a mysterious side of reality. The unexpected violent rebellion of Kohlhaas was the outcome of authorities putting up a show (namely, coming up with non-existent laws) so as to 'have fun' at the expenses of a poor man who believes in the authenticity of something that is actually mere appearance. This time the irruption of the prophecy is also the outcome of authorities putting up a show (namely, asking the gypsy while plotting at her back against her predictions) to 'have fun' at the expenses… of something that is beyond them, out of their reach, something that does not play by the same rules and is consequently unbeatable. As Champlin (2012: p. 447) observes, the Elector of Saxony starts believing in the gypsy's prophecy after she passes the test with which both Electors sought to ridicule her. However, her success is only possible because they took violent measures designed to avoid it: by killing the roebuck they make sure that the prophecy will be fulfilled. As was the case with Kohlhaas, their violence has an unexpected result, but whereas no human could have ever been able to foresee it, the gypsy is able to predict the outcome of such violence. Thus her *words* are proved to be right, to really convey the truth, to be a reliable medium. Unlike the ever-failing

human mediums (the *Scheine* and *Mandate*) the prophecy of a *Wahrsagerin,* of somebody connected with the ineffable, is truly performative: it does what it says. To hear it is to make it come true. Needless to say, in a world where the power of words is hollowed out, possessing a performative word concedes unavoidable victory. Why then, took Michael Kohlhaas nearly the whole story to realise that?

The answer can be easily found at the very beginning of the novel: Michael Kohlhaas was "[…] einer der rechtschaffendsten zugleich und entsetzlichsten Menschen seiner Zeit […] das Muster eines guten Staatsbürgers […]"[17], whose only flaw was that he "[...] in einer Tugend [...] ausgeschweift h[a]tte".[18] Kohlhaas believes in state law and hence he firstly tries to recover his robbed dignity through it. Recover it he must, for his *Rechtgefühl* does not allow him to tolerate any injustice. This means, however, that to that end he is ready to do whatever it is required. Unfortunately, that extends to sacrificing his wife and his children. As happens to be the case when, given that his dependence on state law demands of him that he travel and dedicate time to present his case to the court, he decides to sell his house and send his wife Lisbeth and children away. Horrified by such perspectives, Lisbeth pleads a last chance, offering herself as the intermediary between her husband and the law. Since that law is nevertheless unreliable, she dies. Right before dying, she gives Kohlhaas the same advice he would later be given by Luther: citing the Bible, both beg for Kohlhaas to follow Christ's example, and forgive his enemies, something he admits he cannot do then. Nevertheless, once in house arrest in Dresden, Kohlhaas starts to behave differently. If during the first sequence he had altogether renounced to his future (his children), now he keeps them with him, and as the novel marches towards its conclusion we see more and more of a Kohlhaas taking upon the role of a father. He cancels the selling of his house and takes great care of his children. Eventually the narrator tells us explicitly that

> Seine Absicht war mit seinen fünf Kindern nach Hamburg zu gehen, und sich von dort nach der Levante oder nach Ostindien, oder so weit der Himmel über andere Menschen, als die er kannte, blau war, einzuschiffen: denn die Dickfütterung der Rappen hatte seine, von Gram sehr gebeugte Seele auch unabhängig von dem

[17] [MK, p. 13, ll. 2-7]
[18] [MK, p. 13, l. 13]

> Widerwillen, mit dem Nagelschmidt deshalb gemeinschaftliche Sache zu machen, aufgegeben.[19]

As is obvious, Kohlhaas at this point has renounced to keep on fighting at least with the methods he has heretofore employed, for his lost dignity. He prioritises his children in a way reminiscent of that of *The Marchise von O*[20], and so he is ready to accept circumstances he deplores, such as a partnership with the false Nagelschmidt. Without consciously knowing it, Michael Kohlhaas is putting into practice what Kleist recommends to do in his *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden und gestört –auch unter den grössten Drangsalen des Lebens, ihn zu geniessen!* In this short essay, written estimatedly seven to nine years before the publishing of the first part of *Michael Kohlhaas* in the magazine *Phöbus*, Kleist explains in a fictional letter to his friend Rühle the importance of following the example of the greatest men history has ever witnessed –such as Socrates, Leonidas, Regulus and, interestingly, Christ – and stop making one's happiness dependant of external and always-mutable circumstances. Quite the opposite, happiness must be derived from one's own virtue:

> Lassen Sie uns also das Glück nicht an äußere Umstände knüpfen, wo es immer nur wandelbar sein würde, wie die Stütze, auf welcher es ruht; lassen Sie uns lieber als Belohnung und Ermutterung an die Tugend knüpfen, dann erscheint es in schönerer Gestalt und auf sicherem Boden. Diese Vorstellung scheint Ihnen in einzelnen Fällen und unter gewissen Umständen wahr, mein Freund, *sie ist es in allen* [...][21]

Kleist argues then that happiness is to be reached "[…] in dem erfreulichen Anschaun der moralischen Schönheit unseres eigenen Wesens […]"[22], in the peace of mind and spirit which only the knowledge of having acted virtuously can provide. Kleist goes as far as to state that,

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[19] [MK, p. 112, ll. 28 – 35]

[20] „Durch diese schöne Anstrengung mit sich selbst bekannt gemacht, hob sie sich plötzlich, wie an ihrer eigenen Hand, aus der ganzen Tiefe, in welche das Schicksal sie herabgestürzt hatte, empor. [...] Ihr Verstand, stark genug, in ihrer sonderbaren Lage nicht zu reißen, gab sich ganz unter der großen, heiligen und unerklärlichen Einrichtung der Welt gefangen. Sie sah die Unmöglichkeit ein, ihre Familie von ihrer Unschuld zu überzeugen, begriff, daß sie sich darüber trösten müsste, falls sie nicht untergehen wolle, [...] der Schmerz ganz und gar dem heldenmütigen Vorsatz Platz machte, sich mit Stolz gegen die Anfälle der Welt zu rüsten. Sie beschloß, sich ganz in ihr Innerstes zurückzuziehen, sich, mit ausschließendem Eifer, der Erziehung ihrer beiden Kinder zu widmen, und des Geschenks, das ihr Gott mit dem dritten gemacht hatte, mit voller mütterlichen Liebe zu pflegen." *Die Marquise von O*, as in Müller-Salget, Klaus (Ed.) (1990) *Heinrich von Kleist. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Erzählungen, Anekdoten, Gedichten, Schriften*. Vol III. Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, p. 167, ll.10 – 30.

[21] Emphasis in the original. From now onwards, all references to *Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg zum Glück...* will be cited as [AWG, p. 516, ll. 29 – 36]

[22] [AWG, p. 519, ll. 13 – 14]

contrary to what may appear to be the case, virtue is always rewarded, for "[d]a waltet ein großes unerbittliches Gesetz über die ganze Menschheit, dem der Fürst wie der Bettler unterworfen ist. Der Tugend folgt die Belohnung, dem Laster die Strafe."[23] This "unerbittliches Gesetz" eventually ensures that to the virtuous one even " [...] solche stillen Wünschen werden oft empfunden, und ohne Geräusch und Auspruch erfüllt.[24]" Inasmuch as Kohlhaas completely gives up his fight against a world that eventually has been proved irrational precisely due to the prevailing lack of virtue (the infamous "allgemeine[…] Not der Welt") he is granted his wish. He is given a medium that will effectively lead him not only to the restoration of his dignity, but to a restoration that will allow his virtue to shine for all to see. With the prophecy –the ineffable "geräuschlose Belohung" for the virtue he has displayed – Kohlhaas defeats his enemies not by violently killing them, but by condemning them to rot in oblivion: the Elector of Saxony will only be remembered for his political position in the considerably restricted pages of historiography. Kohlhaas, on the other hand, who would have been forgotten should he had continued to be "das Muster eines guten Staatsbürgers", will forever be remembered. Undoubtedly, he outcomes the confines of historiography and enters the universal realm of literature, to become a prototypical character. In the end, the reader does not need to be told that, while Kohlhaas' offspring survives happily and healthily, the lineage of the Elector of Saxony will eventually perish.

2. 4. The necessary example of Michael Kohlhaas

As has been shown, Michael Kohlhaas' real preoccupation lied in having his dignity as an individual subject recognized. That would indirectly imply acknowledging that his interests, his voice, his own persona, cannot just be overlooked and discharged as a mere "[…] unnützer Querulant[…]"[25] whenever a Junker takes fancy of one of his possessions. As established, Kohlhaas first attempt to be heard over through the use of violence, although understandable, proves to be ineffectual because it eventually does not face the real problem: the answer to an unfair state is not and cannot be lawlessness, for it results in abandoning "[…] den Damm der menschlichen Ordnung […]"[26]. Quite differently, the right strategy against authorities that

[23] [AWG, p. 522, ll . 6 – 8]
[24] [AWG, p. 530, ll. 33 – 34]
[25] [MK, p. 45, l. 34]
[26][MK, p. 74, ll. 35 -36]

shield themselves behind an apparently immutable and rationally fair law (which is nonetheless adapted to suit their interests) is doing precisely what they cannot or will not do: holding one's ground and defending virtue regardless of the attacks faced. Once this virtue is maintained with a firm stance the situation somehow corrects itself. This is the case of Michael Kohlhaas, whose story Kleist narrates until Kohlhaas becomes the paradigm of virtue, of *Rechtsgefühl* sustained through and through until the very end. Once Kohlhaas swallows the prophecy, he is finally heard and rid of all the doubles and substitutes created by his futile attempts to be heard through conventional mediums (Zachary, 2010: p. 174). His voice appears now in all its self-evident essence and it speaks not only inside the story but throughout time and space: he has become a prototypical figure and thus Kleist can but say: "Hier endigt die Geschichte vom Kohlhaas."[27] Hence Kohlhaas exits the story with the thunderous force of a lightning bolt, not unlike the many 'Schläge' and 'Blitze' that had been a constant leitmotiv throughout the whole novel.

In the end, Kohlhaas has achieved such a feat by holding true to himself and his own private sense of justice, a virtuous law which he initially tried to make, unsuccessfully, universal. In what can be considered as yet another possible account for the great violence flowing undercurrent during the whole narration, Miller (1992: p. 315) claims that carrying out such a "law above law" is intrinsically violent even when done in the most non-violent way (passive resistance for instance). This explanation does come helpful too when understanding why violence is frequently found in Kleist's stories, for many of his works have something in common with *Michael Kohlhaas*. They usually tell the tale of an individual who, against common practice, chose to stay true to his own set of values, to his private idea of virtue[28]. Yet *Michael Kohlhaas* is singled out among Kleist's works for being drawn out not only from a very precise event in history, but also from a real historical figure. Why did Kleist choose the (his)story of Hans Kohlhase and why his retelling took such obvious detours from historical events? Why did he feel the need to present his Kohlhaas not like a violent and failed rebel but like a clear case of somebody who, far from letting himself be ruled out by unfair and twisted laws, struggled to find a way for his subjectivity to be heard and taken into account? A case of somebody who eventually situated himself *beyond* all his external circumstances, thus triumphing over

[27] [MK, p. 141, l. 37 – p. 142, l. 1]
[28] For instance, *The Marchise von O*, *Die Verlobung in Chili* or *Penthesilea*

them forever? The answer is again to be found in Kleist's *Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg zum Glück zu finden:*

> Vielleicht sehn Sie sich um in diesem Augenblick unter den Völkern der Erde, und suchen und vermissen einen Sokrates, Christus, Leonidas, Regulus etc. Irren Sie sich nicht, mein Freund! Alle diese Männer waren große, seltne Menschen, aber daß wir das wissen, daß sie so berühmt geworden sind, haben sie dem Zufall zu danken, der ihre Verhältnisse so glücklich stellte, daß die Schönheit ihres Wesens wie eine Sonne daraus hervorstieg.[29]

As Miller (1992: p. 319) explains, the paradox of laying down a new law is that it always needs an institutionalized precedent to whom to appeal. And yet, "as soon as either Michael Kohlhaas, the man, or *Michael Kohlhaas,* the story, is authorized from the past and institutionalized for the future, he or it is no longer novel […] but homogenous to what already has been legislated" (Miller, 1992: p. 319). At a time when there was an abundancy of citizens' struggles failing to have recognised their dignity and their right to no longer be the victims of the rulers' aleatory whims and wishes, Kleist's retelling of the story of Hans Kohlhase becomes as revolutionary as his main character, for it brings some hope to a rather bleak landscape. The possibility of a virtuous struggle being rewarded with what is concomitant to human existence –that is, human dignity – becomes altogether too real, for Kleist tells us it has happened before. *Michael Kohlhaas* rises thus as the proof that there is actually no need for violent rebellions, nor for the weak to get lost in the same treacherous and self-multiplying mediums employed to attack them. A silent yet firm holding of their grounds will sooner or later pay off, for at the end of the day the unvirtuous will always take a false step and they themselves will arrange their own downfall and condemnation. If a reading of *Michael Kohlhaas* can prove that, then it means that, as Miller (1992: p. 319-320) and Zachary (2010: p. 184) claim, Kleist's story is like the gypsy's prophecy: an exploration of a text's performative ability, its capacity to have an effect outside its own frontiers.

Certainly, Kleist's text is to historiography the same that the gypsy's episode is to *Michael Kohlhaas*: an apparently fantastical interruption that nonetheless forces a rereading of the whole (his)story, to finally carry it towards a new direction. The gypsy's magical episode

[29] [AWG, p. 529, ll. 19 – 26]

shows the reader how all along his misfortunes Kohlhaas had had the remedy to them right under his nose. Similarly, the magical episode of *Michael Kohlhaas* shows the reader how all along his misfortunes the remedy to them has been already there, in history, in a modern (unlike Socrates, Leonidas or even Christ) example of a fellow citizen who overcame with his virtue his unfair rulers. Historical chronicles may say otherwise, but let us not forget that 'the word as rational narrative' has been unmasked as unreliable, for it is subject to the interest of Junkers, Electors and the like. If, like Kohlhaas, we can no longer trust 'the words of rationality' the answer is not to detach ourselves of human reality, but rather, to pay attention to the words of poetics, the only human word able to express and expose the unfolding of that unwritten law that says all evil is powerless when virtue holds its ground. Only poetics can make us understand that the virtuous Kohlhaas is eventually given back all that he was stolen. Only poetics can narrate how, from the dead, from the not-being to which they had been condemned by biased human law and rule, his two horses come back to life, as does his "Lisbeth" in order to assist him. In that sense, both the gypsy's episode and Kohlhaas swallowing her prophecy become an act of self-reference: *Michael Kohlhaas* is the prophecy for all the Kohlhaases struggling today. Michael Kohlhaas is the man who shall shine like the sun when surrounded by the tempest[30], whose example shall pervade over time and transcend his own frontiers, namely, the text.

3. POETIC'S MORAL REFERENTS II: THE COLLECTIVE EXAMPLE OF *THE MASK OF ANARCHY*, BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

3. 1. A preliminary analysis

As has been mentioned above, in his essay *Laying Down the Law in Literature* Miller points out how any course of action based on a "law above law" is intrinsically violent, even when done in the most non-violent fashion, such as that of passive resistance (1992: p. 315). As will be discussed now, what Kleist suggested as a way to make his character triumph above his enemies is exactly the same strategy Shelley foregrounds in *The Mask of Anarchy*, albeit in

[30] „Sie [die Tugend, P. D. P.] ist der Sonne gleich, die nie so göttlich schön den Horizont mit Flammenröte malt, als wenn die Nächte des Ungewitters sie umlagern." [AWG, p. 520, ll. 20 – 23]

a much larger scale, focusing not on the individual but on the collective. Indeed, and despite its violence-impregnated imagery, Shelley*'s The Mask of Anarchy* has been considered the first writing in Western tradition to advocate for pacifism as a means for political change. Interestingly, just as Kleist chose poetics to expose the workings of his proposal of a "law above law", so did Shelley. As he stated in his own poetics, *A Defense of Poetry* (published posthumously in 1840, written in 1821), poetry was the most suitable medium to convey so radical a political message as that of passive resistance. Consequently, it could be but through poetry that Shelley found a way to oblige with his self-imposed moral duty of taking part, actively and analytically, in contemporary political struggles. As I hope to demonstrate, *The Mask of Anarchy* makes for a paradigmatic example of Shelley's particular theory about the social use of poetry being put to work. As will be discussed, it is not only a case of poetry committing to social struggle, but more importantly, *The Mask of Anarchy* boasts excellent results, both in terms of its internal workings, and in terms of its relation to Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*. Arguably, according to Allen (2011), if *The Mask of Anarchy* is lacking in anything it is only in Shelley's usually exceptional literary quality. Notwithstanding, that is not to say that Shelley was altogether oblivious of the formal aspect when composing it. *The Mask of Anarchy* has a rather well defined structure which I think is worth analysing now, even if schematically, given that the poem lasts for 92 stanzas. Having a clear idea of its structure and how its content is presented will be helpful later on, when we analyse how Shelley's poetics are being put into practise in *The Mask of Anarchy.*

To begin with, the poem –touching on the events of what is known as the Peterloo Massacre, which took place on the 16th August 1819 in Manchester– has, content-wise, two well-differentiated parts. The first 38 stanzas amount for Shelley's own recount of what happened, that is to say, Shelley 'describes' the event. In the lasting 54 stanzas Shelley concerns himself with an analysis of the causes and relevance of that event, or in other words, he 'reflects' on what happened and offers an interpretation of what was truly at stakes on that 16th of August in Manchester.

- The descriptive part of *The Mask of Anarchy* (the first 38 stanzas) can be divided into three parts, namely: the first 21 stanzas, dealing with the apparition and advance of Anarchy's parade; then 12 stanzas, from s. XII to s. XXXIII, where events precipitate themselves, for in just these 12 stanzas the maiden Hope appears, the Shape follows,

and Anarchy and its followers are exterminated; and finally the lasting 5 stanzas, from s. XXXIV to s. XXXIX, which describe the atmosphere left after the Shape's victory before going back to maiden Hope, who is used as a mouthpiece to voice the reflection on the events.

- The reflective part, taking the resting 54 stanzas, which can firstly be divided into two parts, both lasting exactly 27 stanzas:
    - The first part, dealing with the concept of 'Freedom'. This fragment, lasting from s. XXXIX to s. LXV, can be similarly divided into another two halves, both beginning with a question: "What is Freedom? […]"[31] for the first part, and "What are thou, Freedom? […]"[32] for the second. From s. XXXIX to s. LII (14 stanzas in total) Shelley first attempts to define 'Freedom' by exposing what it is not, namely slavery, or at least, the slave-like conditions in which most of England's population live. To make his point clear, Shelley advances thematically from a detailed list of examples of those extenuating conditions (always beginning with 'Tis to + verb'[33]), to then proceed with a depiction, in two stanzas, of what happens when the populace complains about them. Finally he concludes by situating, in three stanzas, the Englishman bellow any animal in terms

[31] [MA, s. XXXIX, v. I]
[32] [MA, s. LIII, v. I]
[33] "Tis to work and have such pay" [MA, s. XL, v. I]; "Tis to see your children weak" [MA, s. XLII, v. I]; "Tis to hunger for such diet" `MA, s. XLII, v. I]; "Tis to let the Ghost of Gold" [MA, s. XLIV, v. I]; "Tis to be a slave in soul" [MA, s. XLVI, v. I]

of freedom.[34] Once this negative definition of 'Freedom' is made, Shelley exposes what 'Freedom' actually is, from s. LIII to s. LXV (13 stanzas in total). This time, the leading motive is 'Thou art'[35].

- The second part, dealing with Shelley's recommended course of action, lasting from s. LXVI to s. XCI. Here Shelley focuses on what the right course of action should be when taking into consideration what has been said about 'Freedom'. Again, this part dealing with 'Action' can be divided into two halves of 14 and 13 stanzas respectively: from s. LXVI to s. LXXIX Shelley explains how that action should be. From s. LXXX to s. XCI, the consequences of that action are described, namely the unquestionable triumph of the oppressed ones thanks to the new strategy in fighting that Shelley urges them to use.

3. 2. Passive resistance: a necessary change in strategy when fighting injustice

If we took the trouble to briefly analyse the structure of *The Mask of Anarchy* it is not only because that will be helpful from now onwards, but also because I was not able to find an analysis of that kind when researching. That might be a sign of what Cameron (1977: pp. 512-515) points out in his essay, namely, that although far outnumbering his lyrical ones, Shelley's political and revolutionary works have been subjected to far less critical and scholarly attention.

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[34] It is also noteworthy to see how Shelley goes all his way down from savage animals, to esteemed domestic animals, then to despised ones, and finally to Englishmen.

> **Birds** find rest, in narrow nest
> When weary of their winged quest;
> **Beast** find fare, in Woody lair
> When storm and Snow are in the air.
>
> **Horses, oxen**, have a home,
> When from daily toil they come;
> **Household dogs**, when the wind roars,
> Find a home within warm doors.
>
> **Asses, swine**, have litter spread
> And with fitting food are fed;
> All things have a home but one–
> Thou, Oh**, Englishman**, hast none!

[MA, ss. XLIX – LI] Emphasis added.

[35] "Thou are not as impostors say,/ A shadow soon to pass away" [MA, s. LIII, v. I]; "Thou art clothes, adn fire, and food" [MA, s. LVI, v. I]; "Thou art Justice [...]" [MA, s. LVIII, v. I]; "Thou art Wisdom [...]" [MA, s. LIX, v.I]; "Thou art Peace [...]" [MA, s. LX, v.I].

Whether that is due to, as Foot argues (2006: pp. 27-29), a conscious and malicious attempt to censor and bury into oblivion Shelley's openly and clearly expressed revolutionary ideas is something that I shall not be discussing now. What is actually relevant is that Shelley's broad production of politically and socially committed poetry should be but surprising. At least it is so if we take into account Shelley's own claiming in *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1820) that those educated and cultivated have the moral duty of making the oppressed aware of the necessity to reclaim their natural rights, temperately but irresistibly. Thus, Cameron rightly argues (1977: pp. 512-513), the ideas expressed in the main body of Shelley's work (that is, in his political works) are the result of an analytical reflection upon the contemporary situation shaped by the study of historical evolution and the ideas of the French Revolution and the English reform movement. Such reflection is made from the viewpoint of a particular theory of historic evolution which Shelley exposed in his *A Philosophical View of Reform*. There he condenses the unfolding of human history into the clash between two sets of forces, namely, those of liberty and those of despotism. These two forces, exposes Shelley, and more significant, their clash against each other, would have guided all historical developments ever since the dissolution of the Roman Empire. At the time of writing his essay, Shelley perceived the situation in England to be at a turning point. The apparition of the bourgeoisie had led to what he named "the double aristocracy". Its rule, together with the economic framework created by the crisis of the National Debt, had meant for the lower classes a dropping of their living conditions to the unacceptable levels described in the first part of the 'Freedom' fragment in *The Mask of Anarchy*. The very first stanza of this fragment gives a concise description of what Shelley though was the situation of England's populace:

> What is Freedom? –ye can tell
> That which slavery is, too well–
> For its very name has grown
> To an echo of your own.[36]

Because of that, not only was reform necessary, but most importantly, so was it perceived by the great majority of England's population – with the exception of its rulers. Consequently, as Cameron explains (1977: p. 513), the historical optimism emanating from *A Philo-*

[36] [MA, s. XXXIX]

sophical View of Reform was but a logical conclusion resulting from the analysis of contemporary events done with his particular theory. At that time it could only lead to conclude that the forces of liberty were on the rising to eventually annihilate, once and for all, those of despotism. But as is the case with most romantic poets, Shelley's fact-based political poetry was not merely 'a reaction' to contemporary events, but an 'active one' at that. In the same way of Southey's and More's poetry dealing with the abolitionist movement, Collier's poems defending women's rights, or Southey's, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry touching on the Napoleonic wars, Shelley's political poetry attempted to compel his audience to react to the miseries of the suffering in a particular and active way.

Such is the case of *The Mask of Anarchy*, where Shelley ultimately seeks to elicit a very specific answer, based on the equally specific reading of the Peterloo massacre which he offers in his verses. In *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley calls for passive resistance as the only efficient and proper way to demand political reform and to simultaneously react to the brutal oppression with which the government subjugates its population:

> And at length when ye complain
> With a murmur weak and vain
> 'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew
> Ride over your wives and you–
> Blood is on the grass like dew.
>
> 'Then it is to feel revenge
> Fiercely thirsting to exchange
> Blood for blood –and wrong for wrong–
> Do not thus when ye are strong.[37]
>
> And if then tyrants dare
> Let them ride among you there,
> Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,
> What they like, that let them do.
>
> With folded arms and steady eyes,
> And little fear, and less surprise,
> Look upon them as they slay
> Till their rage has died away.[38]

If Shelley's political opinions are to be viewed –as they rightly should– as the result of a rational and meditative analysis, then Frosch (1999: p. 380) may have a point[39] when he suggests that Shelley's turning to passive resistance as a revolutionary tool arises from his realisation thatsustained injustice always elicits a reaction driven by anger. As it had certainly

[37] [MA, ss. XLVII – XLVIII]
[38] [MA, ss. LXXXV – LXXXVI]
[39] I would argue that that is the only plausible supposition with regards as to how Shelley came to the conclusion that passive resistance is the only answer to political injustice, since it can be traced back in Shelley's self-stated approach to political and historical analysis. On the other hand, and regardless of whether or not it makes sense rationally, there are no accounts on behalf of Shelley himself where he acknowledges an "acute and troubled sense of his own inner violence", as Frosch (1999: p. 380) says, which would have led him to favour a total rejection of violence as his preferred *modus operandi* when it came to political fight.

been the case with the French Revolution, acting up this anger humanity enters a never-ending cycle of violence. Actually, in *A Philosophical View of Reform* Shelley explicitly warns against the danger of delaying reformation, since a perpetuation of injustice always leads to violent revolt. Shelley states that

> [t]he savage brutality of the populace is proportioned to the arbitrary character of their government, and tumults and insurrections soon […] become consistent with the permanence of the causing evil, of which they might have been the critical determination.[40]

As a matter of fact, the literary depiction of this deplorable violence can be found in the ss. II – XVIII of *The Mask of Anarchy*. It is worth noting how Shelley exemplifies his own observation about the brutality with which the people revolt against injustice by giving Anarchy's parade a significant order. Mirroring popular parades, where the most significant figure is preceded by some minor ones, Castlereagh[41], Lord Eldon[42], and Sidmouth [43] (all members of Lord Liverpool's government: the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, and the Lord Chancellor, respectively) come before Anarchy, as if making way for it. And rightly so, for Anarchy's entrance is culminated by his self-proclamation of unrestrained power: "'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!'"[44]. Needless to say, if Anarchy is the religious (moral), political and legislative power the chaos is total, arbitrariness and lawlessness reigns. Should such a prospect of violence not be threatening enough, in *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley carries on by warning about how Anarchy soon and easily gathers a troop of minions with whom "[…] Drunk as with intoxication/ Of the wine of desolation […]" [45] it sweeps over the country "[…] With a pace stately and fast, […]/ Trampling to a mire of blood/ The adoring multitude."[46] The populace, when exhausted by a persistent state of deprivation is all too ready to become an "adoring multitude[47]" of Anarchy, to whom to say:

> We have waited weak and lone
> For thy coming, Mighty One!
> Our purses are empty, our swords are cold,

[40] APVR.
[41] [MA, s. II, v. II]
[42] [MA, s. IV, v. II]
[43] [MA, s. VI, v. III]
[44] [MA, s. VIII, v. IV] Emphasis in the original, unless stated
[45] [MA, s XI, v. III-IV]
[46] [MA, s. IX, v. I-IV]
[47] [MA, s. X, v. IV]

Give us glory, blood, and gold.[48]

Thus, in *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley depicts literarily what he has stated *in A Philosophical View of Reform*. When systematically exploited, people turn to anarchic and violent revolt, destroying everything and everyone in their wake. However, according to him, that is not the right answer, for it is not with the help of Anarchy that injustice can be defeated. After all, Shelley notices how Anarchy, now sweeping rampant throughout the land, has been actually ruling the country, if only in a less open manner, for longer that thought:

> And Anarchy, the Skeleton,
> Bowed and grinned to every one
> As well as if his education
> Had cost ten millions to the nation
>
> For he knew the Palaces
> Of our Kings were rightly his;
> His the sceptre, crown, and globe,
> And the gold-inwoven robe.
>
> So he sent his slaves before
> To seize upon the Bank and Tower,
> And was proceeding with intent
> To meet his pensioned Parliament. [49]

Hence why Shelley is convinced that the fight against injustice must start first and foremost with a rejection of the anger it stirs, so as not to fall for a violent and ultimately disappointing answer. Anarchic and unfair government cannot be faced with yet more arbitrariness and unfairness, for that leads only to Anarchy's parade, that is to say, to further aggravating the situation, instead of straightening it. Shelley's answer is then passive resistance, and so does he state in *The Mask of Anarchy*, a move that has always been problematic given the obvious violence which imbues the poem imagery. Unfortunately, now is not the time to analyse Shelley's prolific imagination when it comes to creating violent images. Let it suffice to notice that the word 'blood' comes up sixteen times, or what it is the same, every five stanzas 'blood' is mentioned. To make things worse, even the tone with which a pacifist reaction is

[48] [MA, s. XVI, v. I-IV]
[49] [MA, ss. XIX – XXI]

requested could be arguably regarded as violent.[50]. However, that is not so if the poem is analysed in the way Franta (2001: pp. 765-93) suggests, as a prophecy in reverse, a reading for which the departing point might be the following question: why choose poetics to change the world?

3. 3. Poetry: a time-resistant container of truth

When trying to answer this question Foot (2006: p. 31) falls for what may look like the obvious answer: poems are more easily remembered than pamphlets, and at a time when literacy was not as spread as nowadays, delivering messages in easily retained forms could be crucial. The first stanzas of *The Mask of Anarchy* could even seem to prove his hypothesis, given that Shelley's poem opens with what could look like a typically popular image, namely, that of the poet sleeping and dreaming the tale he will recite:

> As I lay asleep in Italy
> There came a voice from over the Sea
> And with great power it forth led me
> To a walk in the visions of Poesy[51].

This image is nonetheless not so much of a formulaic one if we take into account that at the time of writing *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley was indeed in Italy, in Livorno, and thus he read about Peterloo in the papers (the "voice from over the Sea"). Another element reminiscent of popular tradition is the parading masquerade hosted by Anarchy[52]. I would argue that it contains not only an element of popular satire, as Jones (1994) claims, but is also reminiscent of the carnivalesque and Rabelaisian tradition at its most macabre. Murder tosses human hearts for their hounds to eat[53], as if parodying kings throwing money to their subjects; Fraud cries and his tears turn into mill-stones that crush children's brains[54]; Hypocrisy rides a crocodile.[55] Nevertheless, poetry shortcomings when it comes to transmitting radical political messages may outweigh the potential forthcoming of easiness for remembrance. As Franta (2001: p. 767)

[50] The poem's most famous stanza [MA, s. XXXVIII and s. XCII] *Rise like lions...* is in itself a paradigmatic example of the apparently violent way in which Shelley commends his readers to take a pacifist approach in political fight.
[51] [MA, s. I]
[52] [MA, ss. II – VIII]
[53] [MA, ss. II – III]
[54] [MA, ss. IV – V]
[55] [MA, s. VI]

points out, usually poetry audience is severely limited, not to mention radically inappropriate in the case of Shelley's political works, for their main audience was precisely constituted by those well-to-do, educated, aristocratic, and above all, reactionary classes. Moreover, open interpretability, one of poetry's main characteristics, would appear to work right in the opposite direction of any political message. Poems may certainly be remembered for generations, but in the very same way, a poem is after all 'just a poem'. As such they might end up simply being a succession of pleasantly sounding words, composed for the sake of playing with language and stretching its borders. What is most surprising, however, is that if Shelley chose to convey his political views and messages through poetics, it was not because of poetry being easily remembered even among illiterate people. Nor because, by imitation of popular traditions, its form could make its contents' deliverance easier. Rather, the reasons which Shelley himself puts forward in his *A Defense of Poetry* have more to do precisely with this ever-openly suggestive quality of literary language, and with theories related – even if 'avant la lettre'– to the eclipse of authorial intention as the primary focus of literary interpretation (Franta 2001: pp. 765-793).

In his *A Defense of Poetry*, Shelley elaborates his own poetics, starting from a conception of poetry which bears substantial resemblance to that of the ancient civilisations, as he himself acknowledges. Shelley claims that poets are still, like the 'aoidos' from Ancient Greece, the best historians, philosophers and legislators, since their art is superior to that of History, Ethics, Morality or Philosophy. Poetry, for Shelley, is the ultimate epistemological tool, given that it allows the mind to be ever-encompassing. Put in his own words, Shelley considered that "[…] a story of particular facts is a mirror which *obscures and distorts* that which should be beautiful, poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted […]"[56], thus allowing the mind to accept what morality or ethics would otherwise reject. Actually, according to Shelley, if "[e]thical science arranges the elements which poetry has created […], [poetry, P.D.P.] awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought."[57] Consequently, thanks to its highly

[56] From now onwards, Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry* will be cited as [ADP, par. 9]. Emphasis is mine.
[57] [ADP, par. 13]

stylised and metaphorical language which beautifies whatever it touches (or rather, spells) poetry allows for the mind to take in not only new thoughts but also new and unimagined relations between existing ideas. Language, in its most unrestricted form (arguably, in its literary form, and not that of scientific reason), is the most adequate tool to enlarge our mind, "[f]or language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; […] all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression."[58] Consequently, literary language is the only truly reliable medium, the only one not corrupting its message's essence. This, for Shelley, derives in a very particularly pragmatic use of poetics and poetry: it is the tool for doing good to others, since "[a] man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others […] [t]he great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause."[59] By making attractive others' sufferings and struggles, poetry –as many romantic poems successfully tried– creates empathy where rationality or even ethics fail. That is precisely what Shelley seeks to achieve when, after dedicating no less than twenty stanzas to describe Anarchy's sweeping advance throughout the country surrounded by the lower and powerful classes alike, he introduces in just three stanzas the heroine of the poem, Hope, thus emphasising her defencelessness against her mighty enemies:

> When one fled past, a maniac maid,
> And her name was Hope, she said:
> But she looked more like Despair,
> And she cried out in the air:
>
> 'My father Time is weak and gray
> With waiting for a better day;
> See how idiot-like he stands,
> Fumbling with his palsied hands!
>
> He has had child after child,
> And the dust of death is piled
> Over every one but me–
> Misery, oh, Misery![60]

[58] [ADP, par. 5]
[59] [ADP, par. 13]
[60] [MA, ss. XXII – XIV]

That very same use of poetry as a way to successfully transmit what the falsely precise language of reason cannot convey is to be found too in the first half of 'Freedom', where Shelley, as already stated, not only describes the state of quasi-slavery in which the population of England live, but also emphasises their never-ending suffering by repeating the formula "Tis to + verb", thus bearing down the reader patience slowly but steadily, just as authorities do with their subjects.

But in addition, poetry is not only able to generate empathy and new thoughts, it is moreover able to make them transcend time, for

> [a] poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth […] is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, […] is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains.[61]

Hence, time can only alter poetry as if sculpting new facets to a diamond. It will showcase yet more shades of light, but it will still be a diamond. That is also why, according to Shelley –who thus becomes one of the impellers of the shift in literary interpretation from authorial intention to public reception– sometimes a poem's true geniality might only reveal itself after a long time, when the circumstances are more favourable for people to accept the eternal truth encapsulated in the poem, lethargically waiting for its right moment to shine[62]. Consequently, poets do not only behold intensely the present as it is, but they are also able to behold the future in the present. Not in a short-sighted and superstitious way but in that of a true oracle, says Shelley:

[61] [ADP, par. 9]
[62] "But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty." [ADP, par. 12]

> Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events. Such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry. [63]

3. 4. Poetry: a prophecy in reverse

If Shelley's own poetics are to be taken into account, then Franta's (2001: pp. 765-793) reading of *The Mask of Anarchy* is the most accurate yet. It abides by Shelley's own conception of poetry, which explicitly explains why poetry is the most adequate medium for such a radical political message as pacifism. As has just been discussed, in his poetics Shelley emphasises reception rather than intention, insisting on the fact that poetry can and does transcend generational barriers while transmitting the real essence of an action or event. That is how, as Franta (2001: p. 768) rightly realises, poetry can serve politics. It not only affords privileged views in the future of events which take place in the present, but it also enables particular and more insightful readings in the future of those very present events. Poetry's political power is then to be found in the fact that it can become a "prophecy in reverse: rather than predict the future for the present, it imagines a future that will see the present for what it was." (Franta, 2001: p. 782) Containing the truth essence of a present event, poetry will be able to transmit this truth to a future that will then see the real relevance of it – which might have been lost to political or historical discourse –, and thus react accordingly to it. Consequently, *The Mask of Anarchy* would not just be Shelley's contribution to the contemporary debate about the Peterloo's massacre, but would be a truly performative text, his projecting of Peterloo's significance into the future, designed to stir a particular reaction. In his poetic retelling of the Peterloo's massacre, through the ductility of language, Shelley re-creates the event so that its very essence is foregrounded: that was not yet another failed demonstration which was effectively stopped by governmental forces, but rather, it was the cruel slaughter of innocent and defenceless people who were brave enough to meet their attackers non-violently. What happened in St Peter's Fields in Manchester was that the maiden Hope

> [Then] she lay down in the street,
> Right before the horses feet,
> Expecting, with a patient eye,

[63] [ADP, par. 4]

Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy.[64]

But as said, Shelley does not only recount in a stylised way what happened, he foregrounds the moral superiority that the demonstrators in Manchester had, that Hope had when she chose to simply stand against her foes. If according to historical records that did not grant them victory then, in *The Mask of Anarchy* there is little room for doubt. In a crescendo of four stanzas, between Hope and her enemies a Shapes slowly takes form, and eventually defeats Anarchy and its minions. Only in poetry could moral superiority take form (or shape), so that its effects be observed as if they were the doings of a subject with agency:

> With step as soft as wind it passed
> O'er the heads of men– so fast
> That they knew the presence there,
> And looked, -but all was empty air.
> […]
> And Anarchy, the ghastly birth,
> Lay dead earth upon earth;
> The Horse of Death tameless as wind
> Fled, and with his hoofs did grind
> To dust the murderers thronged behind.[65]

So, Shelley's poetry chooses to foreground one particular side of the Peterloo's massacre and does so by stylising reality in such a way that what is being said about it becomes attractive and apprehensible to future generations. By doing so, from his present time he is compelling future readers to put themselves in the shoes of those standing defenceless in St. Peters' Fields, to put themselves in Hope's place. Eventually he elicits from them the admired empathy that will lead them to emulate those in Manchester, that is, to assert their rights pacifically yet tenaciously, as he himself states at the end of the poem:

> And that slaughter to the Nation
> Shall steam up like inspiration,
> Eloquent, oracular;
> A volcano heard afar.[66]

[64] [MA, s. XV]
[65] [MA, ss. XXX – XXXIII]
[66] [MA, s. LXXXIX]

This way, poetry's apparently most grave shortcoming when it comes to delivering political messages – its open and uncontrollable interpretability – becomes its greatest strength. What contemporaries may see as yet another voice –deceptively innocuous, for how dangerous is a poem after all?– commenting on the news can be, in years to come, the voice triggering change. Hence the masquerade unfolds. What looks as just another take on Peterloo will actually be regarded as the truthful interpretation of that event. What looks like almighty powerful rulers will be (for they can be) shaken off with the mere ability to answer the question "What are thou, Freedom? […]" [67] What was supposed to have an ephemeral effect (poetry, literature) will actually last in time (just in the way politics and historic chronicles where supposed to do). And fiction (Hope, the ineffable 'Shape', the quasi-magical defeat of Anarchy) will become reality, while 'reality' (that which history books recount) will eventually be revealed as yet another veiled and twisted fiction. As I see it, and as Morton (1991: pp. 96-97) and Hendrix (1978: pp. 48-60) point out, this game of dislocations, of masks (of false appearances, as was also the case in *Michael Kohlhaas*), finds echo throughout all the verses of *The Mask of Anarchy*, as if the whole work was unashamedly cueing at itself and its disguised performativity. To begin with, the politicians mentioned are the masks of Murder, Fraud and Hypocrisy, although it should be the other way round. Similarly, Hope firstly appears to look like Despair. A presence – a Shape – seems to appear out of nowhere, protecting the maiden Hope from Anarchy, yet in reality there is nothing between her and her enemy. Hope is saved by no one but her own transformation when she takes a vulnerable stand against Anarchy. And finally what might altogether look as Anarchy caused by revolting citizens who ought to be crushed by the forces of order is, if anything else, Anarchy created by the ruling elites, against whom the populace takes a courageous stance. Just in the same way, violence is dislocated, thus being non-problematic: indeed, a poem imbued with violence is in reality commending readers to passive resistance. The chains which constrain people can actually be shaken off like "dew", so feeble are they despite their feel. In the same fashion, with time and the help of Shelley, what might have looked like the final defeat of people's fight for their rights, namely a massacre, will be

[67] What are thou, Freedom? O! Could slaves
Answer from their living graves
This demand– tyrants would flee
Like a dream's imagery.

[MA, S. LIII]

the beginning of a new political movement, namely pacifism, whenever people is prepared to understand that, as Hendrix (1978: p. 48) says, if *"ye are many –they are few"* is so effective it is because of its surprising obviousness.

So, in *The Mask of Anarchy*, in perfect coherence with his poetics exposed in *A Defense of Poetry* and fulfilling the self-imposed moral duty of helping the oppressed to stand for their rights, Shelley uses language malleability to recreate the Peterloo's massacre in a manifold game of dislocation. This game points at the poem and at poetry's greatest strength when it comes to trigger political and social change: its masked ability to shape the future from the present by embellishing the later so that the coming generations will be able to apprehend its real essence. Once that is done, it will be clearly understood that there is but a plausible course of action, namely, that of passive resistance against oppression and political and social injustice. For Shelley identified the need to defeat people's oppressors not by the ever regrettable employment of violence, by being "Drunk as with intoxication/ Of the wine of desolation […]"[68], but by moral superiority, by practice of virtue, by advancing, as Hope does, "most serene[69]" and "with a quiet mien."[70] Only in this fashion can injustice be eradicated and people granted freedom and dignity. A quiet yet relentless stance eventually allows the truth to shine with all its splendour. For oppressors are few and when faced with such formidable righteousness they will have but one option, their moral defeat being absolute:

> Then they will return with shame
> To the place from which they came,
> And the blood thus shed will speak
> In hot blushes on their cheek.
>
> Every woman in the land
> Will point at them as they stand–
> They will hardly dare to greet
> Their acquaintance in the street.
>
> And the bold, true warriors
> Who have hugged Danger in wars
> Will turn to those who would be free,

[68] [MA, s. XII, vv. III – IV]
[69] [MA, s. XXXII, v. III]
[70] [MA, s. XXXII, v. IV]

Ashamed of such base company.[71]

With the help of poetics, time always unmasks all falsehoods and reveals true essences. If the present political situation looks unsavourily helpless, do not despair. The solution needed is to be found in our history, in models like those of the demonstrators in St. Peter's Fields. If when following their example of passive resistance authorities react with violence, do not despair. An example is being set for future generations to come. That is what is known and transmitted by poetics, truly performative prophecies which annihilate all frontiers of time and space, and thus can be heard over and over:

> And these words shall then become
> Like Oppression's thundered doom
> Ringing through each heart and brain.
> Heard again – again – again – [72]

4. POETICS TRANSCENDS THE TEXT: *MICHAEL KOHLHAAS* AND *THE MASK OF ANARCHY* AS PERFORMATIVE PROPHECIES

As has likely become evident by now, despite having been written in two different languages, by two authors living in countries with completely different social and political contexts, both *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* share considerably significant similarities. After all, both Kleist and Shelley suffered during their whole lives the consequences of their non-conformity with their aristocratic descent, and their literary production earned them little recognition while alive. The Prussian and British context at the time had too something in common, and namely, that both countries had experienced considerable social and political turbulences out of discontentment with the present status quo. Similarly, and although at first glance one is an *Erzählung* (a short piece written in prose) and the other a rather long poem (written in verse), the two works share a significant amount of similarities, which now shall be resumed.

In terms of their content, both *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy*:

[71] [MA, ss. LXXXVII – LXXXIX]
[72] [MA, s. XCI]

- Are tightly connected with an historical event, either by using it as a source of inspiration, as is the case of *Michael Kohlhaas*, or by making open reference to it, as happens to be the case in *The Mask of Anarchy*. More importantly, that historicity laying at the deepest core of their content is emphasized in both works. Kleist is neither the first, not the last author who took inspiration from an historical event to device the plot of his work. However, history as source of inspiration is not always so openly acknowledged as it is in *Michael Kohlhaas*. As has been discussed, Kleist does remind the reader time and again that what he is narrating is the reconstruction of a real event, allegedly made after studying all the records available. As for Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*, it was written in the very same year the Peterloo Massacre took place, and its direct reference to "that slaughter to the Nation" actually delayed its publication until 1832.

- When dealing with those historical events, both works emphasise in their reading how the current power is an anarchic one. They discuss how the supposedly existing mechanisms to guarantee separation of powers –and the resulting fair, impartial government and law– are being hijacked by the ruling authorities, who use all their power to maintain a status quo where the weak ones suffer the consequences of their arbitrary rule. Moreover, both authors establish a clear link between that 'anarchy in the shadow' and 'anarchy in the open'. That is to say, Kleist and Shelley link the unfair rule of the current authorities and the absolute chaos steaming from popular revolt once the subjects can no longer endure the systematic abuse inflicted to them. To both authors, the latter is a direct consequence of the former. In that sense it is worth noticing how Anarchy's proclamation "I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!" (made in the open, when Anarchy has taken to parade throughout the country) resembles Kohlhaas' statements made in his mandates. There he steadily identifies himself more and more with a new ruling power that, effectively, is divine and has the absolute power in terms of both political and legal authority.

- Hence, both works make a very clear rejection of violence as a mean to battle unfair government, denouncing its inefficiency whenever it comes to voicing fair demands and trying to get them heard and taken into account. Significantly, both in *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* violence is linked to a state of furore, madness or *Ohnmacht* of all rationality. Kleist states that during his uprising, Kohlhaas is in a constant state of madness, thus why Luther sets upon himself to "[…] [Kohlhaas, PDP] in den Damm der menschlichen Ordnung

zurückzudrücken […]"[73] Similarly, those endorsing Anarchy are described "Drunk as with intoxication/ Of the wine of desolation."[74]

To that state of madness and violence Kleist and Shelley oppose the calmness and clarity of mind linked with passive resistance. In *The Mask of Anarchy*, Hope, despite her apparently deranged entrance, eventually advances "most serene"[75] and "with a quiet mien"[76]. Later on, Shelley commends his audience to "Stand [ye] calm and resolute […]"[77]. As has been stated, Kohlhaas' victory also requires for him to, put bluntly, calm down and regain that serenity his wife admired in him when, at the beginning of the *Erzählung*, she saw him seeking justice non-violently[78].

- Moreover, as has been stated, both works pledge for passive resistance as the ultimate strategy in political and social struggle. In order to avoid a never-ending circle of violence, both Kleist and Shelley shift the fight for social fairness to a moral level. That allows them to emphasize and praise the moral superiority entailed in a flat rejection of all forms of violent action and in the taking of a serene but resolute stand against unfairness. In that sense, *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* are works presenting exactly the same moral example, even if individually in Kleist's work and collectively in Shelley's. Both authors stress the fact that, although defeated in the short term (for they have been crushed by the ruling powers), in the long term their protagonist are the indisputable winners, for they have won the moral battle. As Kleist so cleverly illustrates, it is precisely at the moment when Kohlhaas is executed that the Elector of Saxony experiences an *Ohnmacht*, in each and every single sense of the word[79]. Shelley dedicates from s. LXXXVII to s. LXXXXIX to describe the defeat of the ruling powers once faced with passive resistance. In that sense, I would like to point out the evident resemblance that such an extreme (to the point of death) moral example has with martyrdom. Indeed,

[73] [MK, p. 74, ll. 35 – 36]
[74] [MA, s. XII, vv. III – IV]
[75] [MA, s. XXXII, v. III]
[76] [MA, s. XXXII, v. IV]
[77] (MA, s. LXXX, v. I)
[78] Once he gets report of the events at the Junker's castle in his absence, Kohlhaas insists on first speaking with Herse, so as to know his take of the story. After asking Lisbeth –the first one to urge Kohlhaas to not revolt– to fetch him, the narrator states: "[...] und die Hausfrau, die sich über seine Gelassenheit sehr freute, ging, und holte den Knecht." [MK, p. 19, ll. 36 – 37]
[79] In German, *Ohnmacht* describes a state of unconsciousness, and it is the medical voice for a faint. What is interesting, and what Kleist uses to his fullest advantage, is that the word is composed by *ohne Macht*, a phrase synonymous with "Machtlosigkeit", literally "lack of power".

what Kleist and Shelley seem to be commending the readers to do (Shelley all the more explicitly) is, if necessary, 'to die for the cause', thus infusing social struggle with a new sense of teleology.

I think it is not farfetched to say that Kleist and Shelley felt that indeed, desperate times call for desperate measures. Especially when considering the circumstances at their time. Old structures of power had lost all legitimacy and seemed to be collapsing yet resisted total extinction. Social structure was shifting with the appearance of new classes. And the existing traditional life was also doomed by the apparition of new technologies.

- The fact that Kleist and Shelley's moral examples have an historical referent leads them to introduce an element that becomes recurrent in both works, namely, the idea of misleading first impressions and the elusiveness of truth, always hidden under a cover of lies or fake appearances. As such, and as has been discussed when analysing both works, the dislocation motif is to be found in the two of them and it operates at more than just one level. Within both *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* violence, power, and truth are dislocated or masked. Similarly, the two works are themselves dislocated or masked. They appear to be two literary pieces, thus restricted to the world of subjective art. But in reality they constitute at least as valid an interpretation of history as that which the chronicles may offer, thus inscribing themselves in the sphere of objective historiography.

- Concerning historiography, both works reject its alleged objectivity by problematizing narration. In the case of *Michael Kohlhaas* that can be seen in the role narration plays within the work (both in terms of how characters come to know about events and in terms of the narrator's reliability). Together with the connection *Michael Kohlhaas* has with historiography this allows Kleist to deeply question the possibility of reaching any objective understanding of any historical event. Thus historiography's objectivity is called into question. The debunking of historical chronicles' objectivity means that, in terms of the truthfulness contained, Kleist can successfully level up his take on Hans Kohlhaase with that offered by historical accounts. As a matter of fact, Kleist eventually rejected the study of Law (yet another objective science) in favour of Literature by claiming that

> […] nicht die Rechte […], nicht die *schwankenden ungewissen, zweideutigen* Rechte der Vernunft will ich studieren, an die Rechte meines Herzens will ich mich halten, u

> ausüben will ich sie, was auch alle Systeme der Philosophen dagegen einwenden mögen […][80]

For his part Shelley emphasises the impossibility of truly knowing anything through rationality instead of through sentiment and feeling. As seen in *A Defense of Poetry*, according to Shelley only empathy can lead to complete knowledge, for in order to understand deeply it is necessary to imagine intently, to walk in the other's shoes. Again, that is something which historiography, with its pretence of objectiveness, cannot achieve. So, whether it is by negating any possibility of objectiveness, as Kleist does, or by emphasizing the greater possibilities for knowledge that subjectivity offers, as Shelley does, both authors stress the overwhelming superiority that literature has when trying to reach the most truthful interpretation of reality.

- Consequently, in *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* self-reference plays a crucial role. Through the strategies already discussed, the two works foreground poetics' ability to change the perception of historical developments and ultimately, the understanding of present situation and future prospects. This act of self-reference may as well explain the nonetheless significant differences to be found between the two works, which lie more on the formal and stylistic side. Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* is an *Erzählung*, that is, a text written in prose, and hence a text where content is supposed to predominate over form (if within the limits of the stylization that a literary text requires). Yet Kleist's language in *Michael Kohlhaas* is incredibly stylized, and its rhythm –sometimes verging on versification– seems to offer itself as proof of Shelley's statement that "`[a]ll the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, […] but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the element of verse, […]"[81] As a result, *Michael Kohlhaas* boasts a superb literary quality, in which its internal workings and Kleist's goals wrap themselves, thus becoming less obvious. On the other hand, Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy* is a poem, and as such it is mostly expected for form to prevail over content. However, I would agree with Allen (2011) that *The Mask of Anarchy* is not Shelley's best poem. Nonetheless, all throughout its stanzas Shelley's goal is made earnestly obvious, so becoming formally the antithesis of *Michael Kohlhaas* while playing the very same self-referential game: Kleist's *Erzählung* is a narration whose form, rather than delivering content unnoticed, points out precisely how much

[80] From now onwards Kleist's letter *An Wilhelmine von Zenge. April/Mai 1800* will be cited as [W/IV/ 1800, p. 55, ll. 31-34]. Emphasis is mine.
[81] [ADP, par. 8]

that content can be altered depending on how it is narrated; for its part Shelley's work is a poem whose form proves that, when expressed in the right format, any content can get through, anytime, anywhere.

- Finally, that unabashed element of self-reference is vital to what I believe to be the most remarkable characteristic that both works share, namely, their strong performativity. Both *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* are performative texts inasmuch as the two works re-visit an historical event so as to point out – by means of showing it at work – literature's ability to single out, draw attention to, and eventually change the way that event is perceived. Once sifted by poetics, reality gains a new perspective which lies in greater accordance with the author's interests: it offers the present an inspiring past that helps devise better ways to face the future. *Michael Kohlhaas* and *The Mask of Anarchy* become thus performative texts given that their ability to reshape the past modifies the understanding of the present, and by doing so, potentially changes the future. I would like to point out that this attempt of offering a figure whose notorious example can draw people to unite and conform a community which will take him as reference of the conduct that should be observed to achieve a better state, does not only bear considerable resemblance to Christian thought, but also to Communism. Less than twenty years before the publication of the Communist Manifesto Kleist and Shelley were already suggesting that the demand of justice would never ever be silenced when done non-violently (Kleist). Moreover, all unfair governments could be taken down if, instead of a single Kohlhaase, all people united to pacifically denounce them (Shelley). This performativity of literature (showcasing the past in a new light to further illuminate the present) is *Michael Kohlhaas*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, and literature greatest asset when it comes to contribute to social struggle. As already stated, as soon as Kohlhaas swallows the prophecy and is executed his voice and moral example escapes the confinements of time, for it will be not forgotten. Similarly, Shelley reminds us, right before concluding his poem, that his words shall be "Heard again – again – again – "[82] In that sense, both Kleist and Shelley insist that, once their stories have been craftily retold in literary language, the protagonists in them effectively transcend time and space, ever-shining in their exemplary moral superiority. All they needed was poetics.

[82] [MA, s. XCI]

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Signatura: