



The File Kleist

A film by Simone Dobmeier, Hedwig Schmutte and Torsten Striegnitz

Funded by Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg

52/ 43 min

Potsdam, the 21st of November, 1811. In a few minutes the German poet Heinrich von Kleist, together with a woman named Henriette Vogel, is going to die here at the Lesser Wannsee lake.

Early in the morning, Henriette Vogel had herself dressed in a white dress with cambric lace. Then they went for a walk in the forest, hand in hand. Now, at the side of the lake, they have ordered coffee and are playfully relaxing like two infatuated children. A few seconds later, two gunshots ring out: The first bullet hits her directly in the heart, the second one hits Kleist directly in the head. A short time later, the two bodies are found by the Prussian Police in a sand hollow close to the lakeshore. In the minutes of the investigating officers, it is noted that no weapons were found at the crime scene.

Furthermore, it is also noted that the two bodies are facing each other in a peculiar arrangement. Henriette's head is leaning back, and a red fleck glares on the white dress in the area of the heart. Kleist's head is sunken upon her breast.

What exactly happened at the Lesser Wannsee lake? Why did one of the greatest German dramatists have to die a violent death at the age of 34?

The police reports made at the historical crime scene reveal when the couple arrived at the inn, what they ate in their last hours, and even how much the saw cost that broke on Kleist's skull during the autopsy. But all the available details do not answer the question: Why did Kleist have to die? Is the death the result of an adventurous biography, or does it actually present the key to understanding the brilliancy of his work? We have to take the inquiry further, to reexamine the complexity of the act from the viewpoint of today's knowledge.

We start, after 200 years, by re-opening the file. Was Kleist shot by someone? Or did he shoot himself? On the basis of the Prussian protocols we reconstruct the crime scene; we return to the original location and, with the assistance of actors, we recreate the possible sequence of events—in all possible variations. Was Kleist the victim or perpetrator? Was it a political intrigue, a relationship drama, or an act of desperation?

Kleist, the linguistic genius. Kleist, the clear-sighted, the vulnerable and, at the same time, the megalomaniac. The dreamer, the adventurer, the patriot and simultaneous fugitive of Prussia. Kleist, the dramatist. How can we approach a man like Kleist two hundred years after his death?

Now the DVD is available.