

Selections from  
*New Stories, Notebooks 1–18*  
“*The Uncanniness of Time*”\*

ALEXANDER KLUGE

translated by JOYCE RHEUBAN

*Foreword*

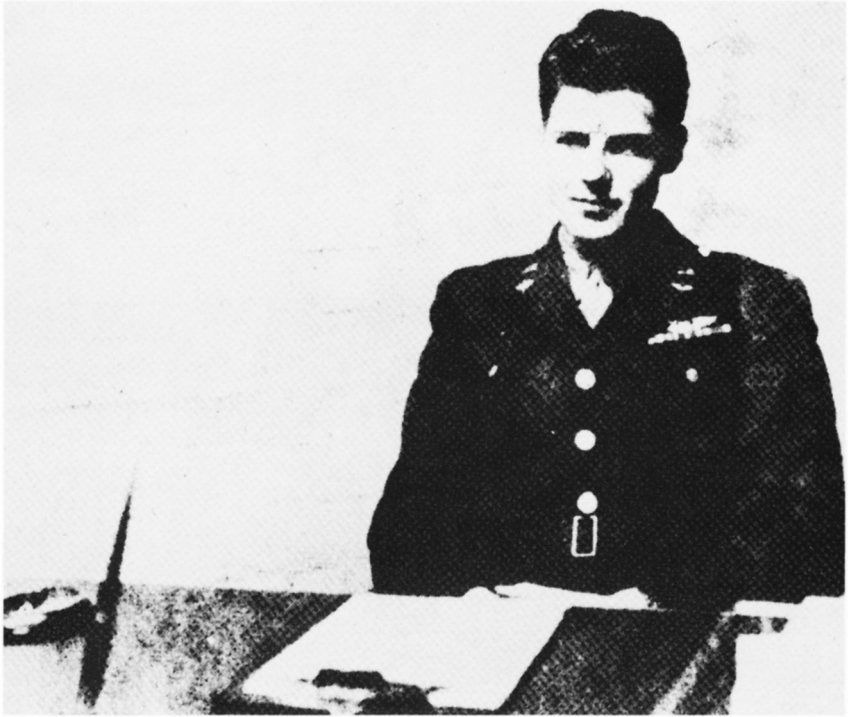
The stories in this book are told in a series of notebooks: 1–18. *Stories without a unifying concept*. I don’t claim that I myself always understand how they relate to one another.

It may seem as though some of the stories are concerned not with the present [*Jetztzeit*] but with the past. They deal with the *present*. A few of the stories appear to have been *cut short*. Then it is precisely this being-cut-short which is the story. The form of a bomb blast makes an impression. Such a form is constituted by being cut short. On April 8, 1945, I was ten meters away from such a blast.

A rain puddle which no one needs, which isn’t terrorized so that it “behaves,” may attain a classical form—the harmony of form and content. We human beings are distinguished by the fact that form and content wage war with each other. If content is a moment in time (whose duration may be 160 years or one second), then form is all the rest, the gaps, precisely that which, at this moment, the story does not tell.

Just one more thing: when I have comprehended something, I go into action, travel, get something under way, or write a theoretical book. The present book is not one of those. Nevertheless, I intend something similar in what I write here. I don’t set about “touching up” the stories once I’ve written them down. I could, for example, have used supplementary citations to clarify mistakes, historical inaccuracies, misinterpretations (that which I did not fully grasp as I wrote). But that is not the *form* in which these stories are told. This form is a feeling which is right only once. And if, theoretically (that is, upon reflection), it is wrong, then it is wrong, and in being wrong, it is also right.

\* These selections are taken from Kluge’s *Neue Geschichten, Hefte 1–18*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, pp. 9, 232–237, and 500–504. Translation by permission of the author.



*The Planner*



*“The Boys”*

*The Concrete Tomb*

## I.

In the Spring of 1943, Plant 2 of the Dingelstedt Army Munitions Factory blew up. The staff technicians were directed to produce an explanation. What were we supposed to do? Our hands were tied. Of course, we immediately took Huy Street toward Dingelstedt and drove into the woods where the munitions factory lay surrounded by a wire fence. There was simply nothing left to “save”; it wasn’t even necessary to write out death certificates for the casualties—no injured, no burning buildings, no anything. Assisting physician Jürgens, who was rubbing his neck to ease his lumbago, asked why there weren’t any bodies. Well, there were enough of them to warrant the all-out alarm from Halberstadt to Braunschweig—you just couldn’t see them.

The factory building was built with brick side walls which supported a massive five-meter-thick roof made of reinforced concrete. How could anyone conceive of an accident that could blow up a factory building like this? Actually, the explosion, whose cause remained unknown (though it was later presumed to have been an exploding munitions container), “blew away” the building’s weaker side walls; and the solid, five-meter-thick security ceiling came down in one piece on top of the women defense workers at work inside the building—a virtual tomb.

## II.

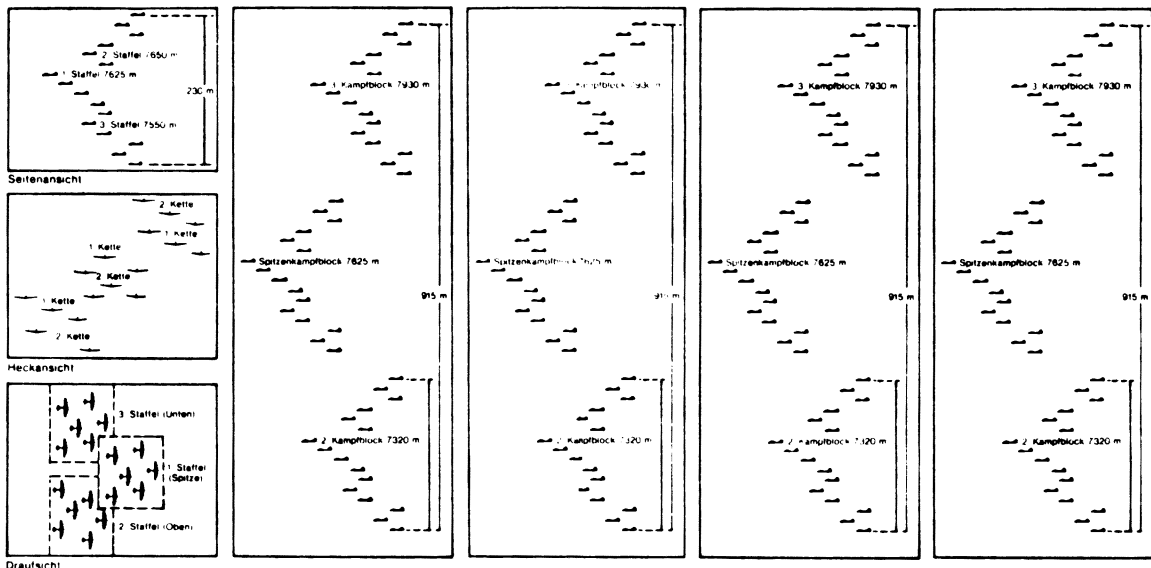
A local physician, Dr. Gaubitz of the local hospital in Halberstadt, was having his lunch that day—sour cherry compote—when the call for help came. On Braunschweiger Street, he passed a column of Pioneer vehicles and cranes. Fire brigades from Badersleben, Athenstedt, and Braunschweig arrived and drove into the preserve—one of the most important secret sites in the district. Dr. Gaubitz always wanted to have a look inside the site’s security fortifications. Thanks to a happy coincidence, this was now possible.

Fire Chief Toelke was there, his fourteen fire trucks lined up at the scene of the accident. He rushed over to Dr. Gaubitz, whose Mercedes Cabriolet, which had been painted gray like a military vehicle, was parked among the trees.

Did you bring the death certificates?

Dr. Gaubitz had two. That wouldn’t be enough. He wanted to see the bodies first. Then he could always look for a few sheets of paper and tear these into four pieces, since it wasn’t the form that mattered but the physician’s signature and certification of death. The fire department experts couldn’t be expected to know that.

That will do fine, said Dr. Gaubitz. There were no dead to be seen anyway. We can’t lift this concrete roof, said the Pioneer First Lieutenant, whose cranes were waiting on the access road outside the compound because, for the moment,



*Staggered battle formations from which planes fly preplanned sorties*

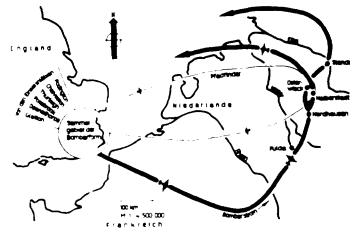
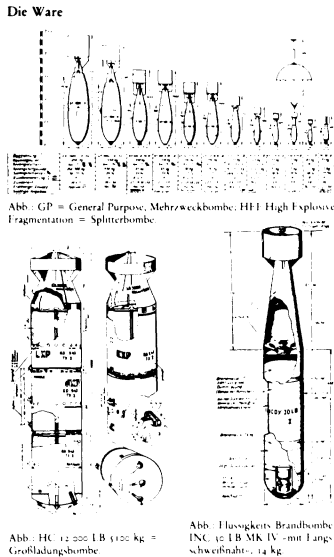
there was no place to park on the factory grounds. Most of those on the scene were in uniform—military personnel, munitions officers, engineers—since the munitions factory, an Army Weapons Office installation, was in a military zone. We have to wait until we can get the cranes in here. Before we can do that, the fire trucks have to be moved. If you are thinking of lifting this roof with a couple of cranes, the First Lieutenant answered, let me tell you that it can't be done.

There was nothing else to do for the time being but stare at this cement roof and wait.

### III.

I don't need forms for the death certificates, said Gaubitz, pieces of paper will do. It's the wording that counts. But without the bodies, I can't do anything. I don't even have the names of the casualties.

There's a lot of them—countless, said the major, the provisional director of the munitions factory. One of the engineers added: they're buried underneath there. He was also upset, now that he had created the impression of activity. Uncountable, said Fire Chief Toelke, doesn't mean innumerable—not by a long shot. The fact that we can't see through the five-meter-thick roof just makes it technically impossible to count them. About how many do you think there are?



### The Merchandise

### Route of the attacking planes. April 8, 1945.

All women, answered an artillery officer who was standing there with them. What I meant was, said Gaubitz, that we need the names of each of the casualties —those going to eternal rest— to establish the number. Maybe we can get a list of people who worked in the building. We can use that to figure out the number of dead, since there don't appear to be any injured. The factory director's adjutant responded immediately: the names of the women on this shift are all on file. Soon more fire trucks arrived from Dardesheim, Ballenstedt, Quedlinburg, along with two Pioneer vehicles from the direction of Heudeber-Danstedt. We have to clear this parking lot right now, said Colonel von Elchlepp. Move them out into the woods. You could hear the explosion almost all the way to London. If the enemy takes the trouble to send a few bombers over here to find out what's going on, this formation of vehicles—according to von Elchlepp—would be next. There has already been enough damage for one day.

In the meantime, Gaubitz set up a first-aid station, where H's emergency team was brought. One fireman cut his finger. The engineers and officers stood around the explosion site in groups. A couple of them climbed up on the concrete roof and walked around the top of this imposing structure.

“Let's not ask about times to come,  
Let's just stay here a little while longer.”

## IV.

This is inexcusable, said Gaubitz, who was standing around with Colonel von Elchlepp, Fire Chief Toelke, several engineers and munitions officers. The question of blame forced its way into the conversation. Gaubitz: it's ridiculous to make the walls so weak and expect protection from an extrareinforced concrete roof. It disregards what we learned from Verdun—that explosions always blow sideways. You could predict a disaster like this from the building plans. If this place hadn't been so secret, if a reasonable person had been permitted to see something like this beforehand—but nobody was allowed to come here, not even nearby to dig up some moss for my rock garden—then this cement ceiling would still be standing and we'd have no more than a few injured.

Engineer Wendland considered such hypothesizing “unnecessary” interference. He said: yes, that's possible. Then who is responsible?, asked the Colonel. Toelke: that will be the subject of a report. Several reports, said engineer Wendland. An oversight or sabotage, we may never know.

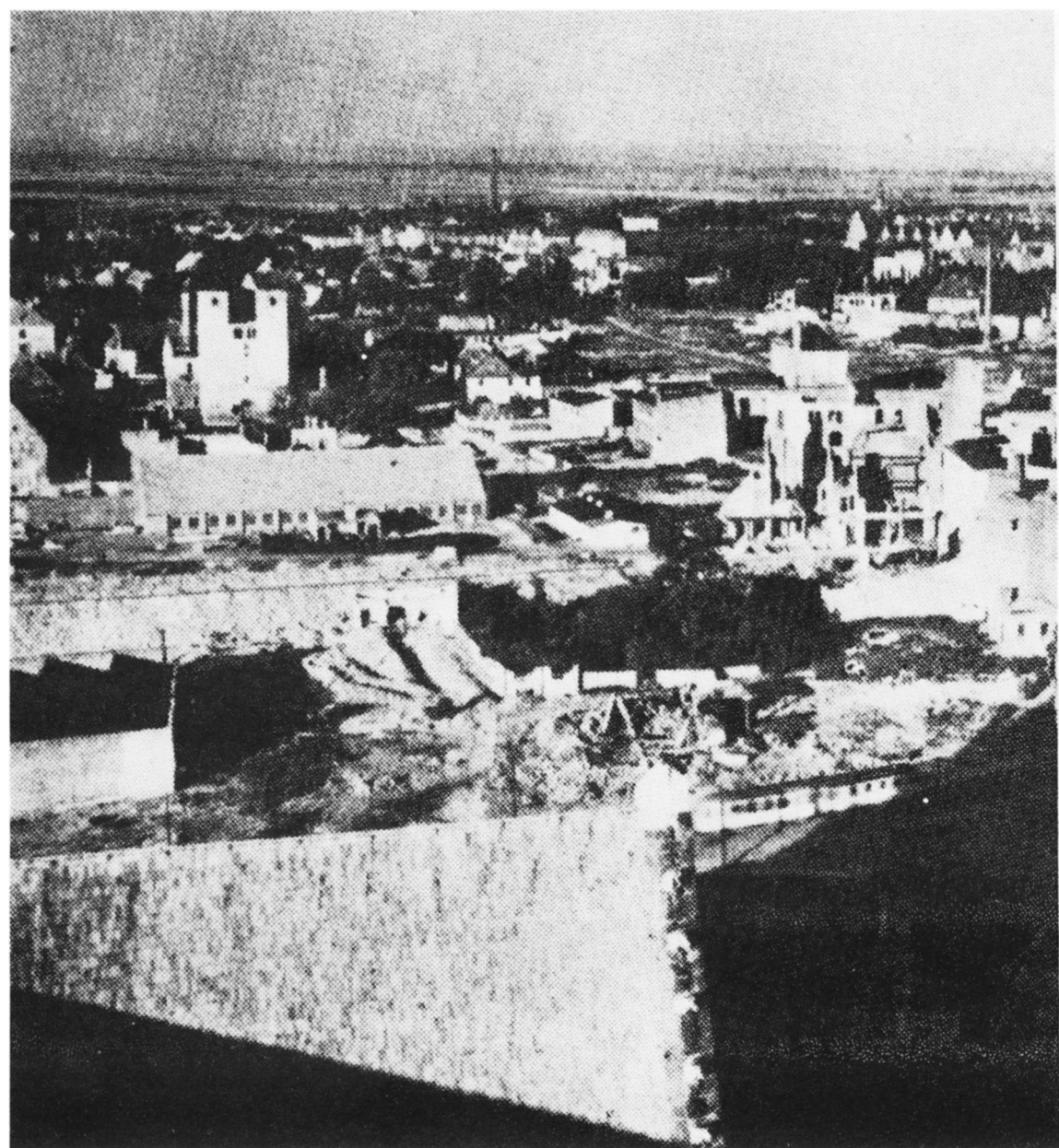
## V.

Then police reinforcements arrived, but since this was a military zone, they had nothing to investigate. The shock still affected those at the scene. No one made a move to direct the officials. Chief of Detectives Wille came over to Colonel von Elchlepp. A young woman was led over by two sentries. The woman claimed she had escaped the “massacre” because she had “stepped out.” It was not permitted, however, under any circumstances, to leave the building during work hours. How did this woman get outside the building? Chief of Detectives Wille intervened. Let the woman have her say first. The commander of the security guard, which was implicated now that the suspicion of sabotage had arisen, retorted: it's out of the question that this woman had permission to leave the building. Did she know something in advance? *If* it was sabotage, asserted the criminalistically trained Wille—a big if. But the excited gentlemen who were under pressure to report to their superiors about something that should not have happened—they had all imagined an accident happening quite differently, assuming that in a “serious situation,” which obviously had to be reckoned with, there would always be something you could do, and that a concrete roof would not just hermetically seal off the whole place—behaved as if they had taken leave of their senses. Take her away, said the Colonel, who to some extent shared responsibility for the weak side walls. Things did not look good.

Everyone was inclined to assume that the woman had left the building through the front door the moment everything “went up in smoke.” “Anything else is an alibi.” In view of the draconian penalties for leaving the inner, restricted zone, that is, the factory building, without authorization, no one would do so without a motive. And we would have caught them, said Chief Engineer Arnold. They went to see the woman, who had been taken away, and asked her



*Sketch of the probable route of the unknown photographer. Thicker arrow to the right: path of the wave of bombers. Thinner arrow from the middle to the left: the photographer's path.*







*"We see how the history of industry and its objective existence, are the open book of man's essential powers, human psychology made present and perceptible . . .*

about the exact circumstances of her exit. The woman's answers were confused. How can she have been in the ladies' room one moment, and gone the next, when she can't even give a coherent account of where the women workers' lavatory was located? Wille, who had no authority here: we know that these women doze off when they are overworked. I don't draw any conclusions from what she says. How do we know the concrete roof came down all at once? It could have come down more slowly on the left side than it did over by the front door. That way, a woman running for her life would have had a chance. Major Löhlein retorted: not so fast. That is a total physical impossibility. And you can't just say this woman was overworked. Or would you like to make this into an allegation of culpability against the plant administration? This is all just speculation, added the Colonel.

## VI.

The woman was taken away and held for the time being in the guard house at the gate. It occurred to no one that she was the only witness who could give an account, however fuzzy, of what went on inside the building just before the accident. The First Lieutenant of the Pioneers and Artillery Engineer Gerstäcker mused about what a shame it was not to have had a chance for an amorous *tête à tête* first with one of the women who now lay dead. They were looking at the I.D. photos in the personnel files which had been brought over. What if it was this kind of incident that led to the accident—maybe an unwanted pregnancy—everything then would have been covered up. That would have made it impossible to charge anyone with rape. All sorts of advantages of the accident.

The winter barley and wheat crops were scanty because of the dry weather; it didn't even pay to harvest them. Farmers across the whole region were complaining, at least the ones who hadn't been drafted.

The young woman, wiry, dark, from the Wiesbaden area, remained under suspicion the whole day. She was in custody in the guard house, watched over by two sentries. Around three o'clock she tried to escape and was shot in the back. Now, at least, Gaubitz had some use for one of the two death certificates he had brought with him. (For the approximately 126 women who lay under the cement slab, he simply signed a list of employees made up from the personnel files.) The young woman who was shot, who had almost been saved by the call of nature, lay until noon of the next day in a room used to store pipe. No next of kin came for the body.

"We won't see a spring like this for another hundred years . . ."

*An Episode from the Age of Enlightenment*

Baron Harkey, who controlled a vast estate in the vicinity of Boston, married Lady Diana Milford in June 1732. Diana was so cold that the Baron was unable to get close to his wife in any sense of the word. She had acquired this reserved demeanor during her upbringing.

Since no one in her Bostonian family ever touched liquor, the Baron was able to get the young woman drunk at one of his hunting lodges during a hunting trip. He and several of his hunting companions succeeded in overpowering the desperately resisting woman, who, without her customary strength, could not defend herself, and they forced themselves upon her.

Once she realized that screaming and struggling were obviously of no use, she bit into the cushions in distress. She was looking at Lord P., one of the younger members of the hunting party, the same Lord P. whom she later, during her attempt to save her child, regarded as its father.

To her husband she behaved as though nothing had happened. She did see to it, however, that when he sat down to the supper table with his friends, he ate his favorite hunting dog, which she had killed and prepared as game. She tried to obtain a divorce from the Supreme Court in Ottawa, but this was futile since, in a legal sense, her husband had committed no breach of the marriage vow; in fact, it was she more than the rapist who violated the "literal" terms of the marriage contract. As it pertained to the hunting companions, the rape charge did carry a sentence, but the Court dropped the charges in view of their high social position.

Since Diana saw no other way to be free of her husband, she shot the Baron in front of his friends while on a hunting trip. While riding a few feet behind him, she shot him with a powerful hunting rifle. He swayed and then hung down against the horse's body. She came up alongside the shying, runaway horse and hit her husband on the head a few times with the butt of the rifle. The Baron's friends disarmed her and brought her and the dead man to the manor house. She remained silent. For a few weeks, people believed it was a hunting accident, until a few witnesses, people who were not of the aristocratic class, came forward to testify.

Diana, Baroness Harkey, with the assistance of Major-General Vickers, who actually believed in her innocence, was highly circumspect in defending herself before the Court. (Unlike the British nobility in their homeland, the colonial aristocracy had no recourse to an appeal to the House of Lords.) Both were, nevertheless, lured into a situation which had been set up by the presiding judge, an ambitious commoner who already held a baronetcy and wanted to prove his acumen. They consented to a hearing proposed by the Court for the alleged purpose of exonerating the unfortunate lady. The sworn witnesses used this opportunity to claim that the accused was guilty and to condemn her "to hang by the neck until dead."

The accused woman accepted this verdict calmly and resolutely, since she preferred it to having to live with her former husband. She couldn't stand people who didn't know what they wanted, who took action and then complained when the time came to pay the price—their weakness of will merely fended off their enemies for a short while. She changed her attitude, however, when in prison she determined that she was having a child. She knew immediately what these strange sensations meant, and had her defense attorney, Major-General Vickers, Ret., who commanded a certain political influence in the mother country, petition the Governor. She herself turned to the Lord Chief Justice and the Court that sentenced her to request a stay of execution until she could bring the child into the world. Since there was a precedent which forbade putting a pregnant woman to death before the child could be delivered, she succeeded in having a doctor sent to examine her. The doctor, who knew nothing about the rape in the Baron's hunting lodge, but gathered from the testimony that the murdered Baron Harkey had been prevented from consummating the marriage because of his wife's frigidity, concluded on grounds of probability that the woman was not pregnant. Since he was relying on the facts of the case, the doctor felt a conversation with the condemned woman sufficed in this instance. He thought it was absurd that a woman like this, who was supposedly so reserved, expected him to examine her by touching her and feeling her body. He left her believing that the actual examination was yet to come and said nothing about his findings to the Baroness's defense attorney. Rather, he simply sent his report to the Attorney General, so that for the time being the condemned woman believed her child was protected—after all, it was using all its might to see the light of day and poking her—until she received the order of execution from the Attorney General. The authorities arranged for the execution to be carried out as quickly as possible since certain social groups which had taken a lively interest in the case saw the sentence as one of the few satisfying official acts of justice. On the other side, the aristocracy was arrayed in opposition to this “unreasonably excessive sentence.” Some seventy prominent Lords filed a brief with the Governor urging him to set the verdict aside because the defendant was a member of the peerage. With this, the Governor could no longer permit the matter to drag on until a pardon was eventually granted by the Queen. Now that the middle-class majority, with a certain show of force, was pressing for a demonstration of their power, the Governor had to act as their representative and accede to a swift execution of the death sentence.

The condemned woman fought back desperately, but was limited to the scope of what she could accomplish from her prison cell. A hastily planned rescue attempt by some of the younger noblemen was foiled when sentry reinforcements appeared. Major-General Vickers, Ret., returned his decorations to the Governor, filed petitions, and finally decided, when all else had failed, to travel to England to interest the Queen in the case. His ship was held up by fog off the coast of Ireland, and he arrived too late.

In response to the urging of the condemned woman, who threatened to tell what she knew about Baron Harkey's private life, the Governor, himself a member of the aristocracy, arranged for one more final hearing to consider the matter of the execution of the sentence. The condemned woman, without her defense attorney, did not succeed in obtaining a second medical examination. All she won was an opportunity to present her argument supporting the fact that she was raped by her husband and his hunting companions, whom she still refused to name. She cited the physical symptoms she had observed. She asked how anyone could think it was her imagination when she could describe the changes in her body so precisely. This very precision, however, raised the suspicion of hypochondria. Since the presiding judge understood nothing about these symptoms and there was a medical report, the jury took the symptoms to be the signs of some illness—if, in fact, these signs actually existed. Illness, however, was not cause for staying the execution. Presiding Chief Justice Dorsen pronounced that, as matters stood, the execution, if it did not take place quickly, would not take place at all. He enumerated, *objectively*, the reasons for sparing the life of the condemned: the uncertainty of human justice and a certain harshness of the woman's fate, *if* her account was true. He came to the conclusion, nevertheless, that she must be put to death, "so that her deed does not devolve upon the province."

Terrified, the condemned woman tried to halt this machine that was taking her child from her. She turned to the aristocracy, her friends, young Lord P., the Queen, and sent messengers to meet Major-General Vickers in Plymouth on his arrival to urge him to hurry. They were successful in having the Queen informed about the case, but the procedure for obtaining a ruling was not completed in time to stay the execution of the sentence. Diana was taken from her cell and hanged, though she fought with all her strength and screamed and struck out so that several executioners were needed to restrain her.

An examination of the dead woman, which had been called for by the aristocracy, established that she was four months pregnant. Major-General Vickers returned from England with an official pardon from the Queen. He challenged the unfortunate Governor and the Attorney General—who were compared to murderers in one of the newspapers he controlled—to a duel, which they declined. Proceedings against the presiding administration led to the Governor's removal from office. Once it became known that the hanged woman was pregnant, the scandal brought about the further result that the credentials of physicians serving the colonial government were henceforth to be more carefully scrutinized. This miscarriage of justice intensified the tone of the Enlightenment, that is, American society of the eighteenth century pressed with intemperate severity toward a more consummate purity.