

Abstract:

In 9 AD a German tribesman and Roman citizen, Arminius, led a revolt against Roman legions at the Teutoburg Forest in what is now northern Germany. The devastating defeat humiliated the Roman military and Empire, effectively ensuring German independence during a period of aggressive expansion and colonization. In the early 2nd Century, the Roman historian, Tacitus, chronicled the events at Teutoburg in his *Annals*, as well as wrote an ethnographic work about the Germanic peoples. Tacitus' writings about the Germans served as a lens for him to talk about his own Roman culture, but they also function as a foundational heritage for later Germans. In the early 16th Century, German humanist Ulrich von Hutten, having read the recently rediscovered Tacitus manuscripts, used the figure of Arminius to give the Germans a legacy, transforming him into a hero comparable to the mythological and historical heroes of the ancient Greek and Roman world in his patriotic work, the *Arminius Dialogue*. Hutten chose to write about a German challenging the Romans less than a decade after Martin Luther posted his 95 theses against the Catholic Church, reflecting the placement of German against Roman, in the ancient world and his contemporary world. 300 years later, the German Romanticist Heinrich von Kleist featured Arminius as a hero in his drama, *Herrmannsschlacht*. By this period in history, Arminius was not only a symbol of national pride and honor, but also a militaristic figure, who outsmarted his enemy. Kleist, too, employed the figure of Arminius (by now, Herrmann) to affirm his political stance. His drama is widely considered a work of anti-Napoleonic propaganda. I am looking at how the Germans were presented in Roman history, and tracking the development of the historical figure of Arminius into a national German hero in the modern German literary world.