

**JUDGMENT AND MORALITY:
GEORG KAISER'S *ZWEIMAL AMPHITRYON* AND ITS SOURCES**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyse Georg Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon* in the light of the various influences at work in his treatment of his subject, in order to seek an answer to the numerous questions raised by the play, and in the process to acquire a better understanding of both the author and the ideas he wished to present to the public.

The play is analysed against the background of earlier works on the myth of Zeus's descent to earth and his seduction of Amphitryon's wife Alkmene; and other possible sources are considered in the light of Kaiser's numerous departures from those works. An investigation into one of the most radical changes he made, in the transformation of the character of Amphitryon, brings to light a little known poem written in the early 1800's and obviously having Napoleon as its subject, which leads to a detailed consideration of Amphitryon's resemblance to Adolf Hitler. The clear parallels between Kaiser's play and the New Testament story of the conception of Jesus are also analysed and show this to be the third major strand in the composition of the play.

An important element in the play, Amphitryon's trial before the citizens of Thebes and its sequel in Zeus's replacement of the sentence imposed by one for an offence not recognized by the Thebans, is discussed, its genesis in the earlier plays and its relationship to Kaiser's own trial for embezzlement considered, and its effect in pointing up the inherent unsoundness of our perception of reality noted. Kaiser's attitude to the actions leading to his trial is also relevant to a consideration of Zeus's role in the play.

The study shows that Kaiser has combined three main themes, the condemnation of war, his Expressionist vision of the regeneration of man and his view of the unique position of the artist in society. In addition he raises a number of important issues that throw light on his own personality, for instance, issues of morality and the nature of justice, of the concept of guilt and responsibility and of human worth and of love.

Preface

The choice of a single, not particularly well-known, play by a twentieth-century German dramatist as the subject of the in-depth study required of a doctoral thesis may seem eccentric. However, in the case of Georg Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon* (1943) there are compelling reasons for the choice.

The study of a literary masterpiece that reworks a mythical subject already intensively treated in European literature can itself be fruitful for the way it illuminates the theoretical question of the productive reinterpretation of myth. The Amphitryon myth is particularly interesting in this respect, having appeared in a succession of literary guises over more than 2,000 years. As detailed analysis will show, Kaiser's play has definite links to previous plays on the theme, but it also departs from them in ways for which there is no precedent whatever. The play thus provides a fascinating illustration of the way in which, through their potential for reinterpretation, the ancient myths remain a constant source of inspiration for writers through the centuries.

Reasons for Kaiser's idiosyncratic treatment of the myth can be found not only in his distressed reaction to the contemporary situation of Europe in the Second World War, but also in personal preoccupations which can be traced throughout his life. His letters in particular provide a rich source with which to document new insights into this play. Careful analysis of the play also reveals a number of thematic parallels in previous and following works by Kaiser, which are also traced in detail. Of particular interest are the legal considerations involved in Amphitryon's trial in Act V, and the complex question of Kaiser's attitude to religion.

Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon* is thus shown to be a complex amalgam resulting from very diverse influences: from myth, literary tradition, contemporary political events, the author's personality and biography. The result is a play which, as the analysis shows, can tell us much about the reinterpretation of myth, about the Amphitryon myth in particular and, not least, about an exceptionally interesting but now neglected German playwright.

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Introduction

The Author

The name of the dramatist Georg Kaiser, though still widely known, is less renowned today than it was in his own time, when he was a particularly important literary figure, a leading exponent of German Expressionism and an imaginative writer whose work encompassed not only plays (he wrote 59 in all), but also film scripts, two novels and a substantial body of poetry. He was born in Magdeburg in November 1878, the fifth son in a family of six, the youngest of whom died at age 11. In a letter to his widow a few years after his death, an older brother recalled him as a nervous child from age 10 on and a sufferer from twitching and head shaking. However he was described as muscular and a soccer player, his interest in that sport being maintained throughout his life.¹ According to his brother, he was not interested in school and partly for that reason, and partly because his father was old and did not have the means to make it possible, he did not complete his secondary schooling up to university entrance level. However, he read a great deal and often went to the theatre.² He was very fond of music and was a keen cello player.

With friends he began in 1895 a literary society, *Sappho*, for which his first

¹ See, for example, Letter 747 of 3/2/41 to his wife, in which he records his pleasure in seeing a match for the first time in a long period. He describes the experience as 'sehr aufregend' and even refers to the typical incursion of a dog on the field 'als wäre das ganze Spiel nur für ihn veranstaltet'. Julius Marx also testifies to his love of the sport - Marx (1970) 86 (14/3/41) and 87 (17/3/41).

² Letter of 21/1/48 from Albrecht Kaiser to Margarethe Kaiser, quoted in Valk (1980b) 8 & 9. Unless otherwise stated, the material for this account of Kaiser's life has been obtained from Valk or from Huder's 'Zeittafel' in his edition of Kaiser's works - *Werke* 6, 849 ff.

plays were written and produced. He read widely, becoming acquainted with the works of Plato and other classical writers, Shakespeare, and Ibsen, as well as those of earlier writers in his own tongue and also those of contemporary authors. He continued to read widely and to extend the range of his reading as the years progressed.

He worked for only a short time in Germany – some weeks as apprentice in a bookshop, where he found himself out of sympathy with the customers, and a few years in an import-export business, which he intended to leave as soon as possible to go overseas. He left Magdeburg for South America in August 1898 and with some difficulty managed to gain employment in Buenos Aires, as a clerk in a branch of a Berlin company. Ill-health took him back to Germany towards the end of 1901. He was convinced he had contracted malaria, and remained of that conviction all his life, but, as he did not consult a doctor, the nature of his illness is uncertain and later psychiatric opinion favoured a nervous origin. After several difficult years, which included a short spell in the ‘Heilstätte für Nervenkranken’ Haus Schönow in Berlin-Zehlendorf, under Professor Laehr, he married Margarethe Habenicht in 1908. She was the daughter of a merchant and brought to the marriage a considerable sum, which was, however, soon spent. Their three children, Dante Anselm, Michael Laurent and Eva Sybille, were born in 1914, 1918 and 1919 respectively.

Kaiser was not called up to serve in World War I, because of his health, but he busied himself with work for the Red Cross and as a member of various committees.

His creative output in the years before 1920 was remarkable and the publication and later production of plays such as *Die Bürger von Calais* and *Von morgens bis mitternachts*³ brought him great fame. However, despite the income he received from these successes, he was unable to manage his financial affairs and his children suffered through his lack of money. The consequence was his arrest in October 1920 on charges of embezzlement – the allegation being that he had sold or pledged items belonging to the owners of properties he had been renting and had retained the proceeds (over 300,000 Mark) for himself. Following his arrest he spent some considerable time in custody, for part of which time he was undergoing examination in a psychiatric clinic. The psychiatrist there, Eugen Kahn, agreed with Professor Laehr's earlier doubts that Kaiser had contracted malaria in South America. Kaiser was finally convicted and sentenced to a year's imprisonment, but when his pre-trial custody was taken into account he was able to be released on probation two months later.

His wife was also convicted for her part in the affair⁴ and it was obvious that Kaiser had put pressure on her to help. He told the court that he had tried to make it clear to her that his only other option was to shoot himself.⁵

³ *Werke* 1, 519 (1912/13); 1, 463 (1912).

⁴ She received a sentence of four months' imprisonment, but what remained after deduction of the period of her pre-trial custody was remitted. See note to Letter 254 to Margarethe Kaiser [6/2/21].

⁵ '... es sei denn der Ausweg, sich eine Kugel durch den Kopf zu jagen'. *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 16/2/21, under heading 'Georg Kaiser vor Gericht'.

In court, Kaiser did not deny the facts alleged, but he firmly denied guilt. To the psychiatrist he had excused himself on the grounds of his absorption in his work, but in his defence speech at the trial he went so far as to claim that his creative achievement and his importance to society placed him above the law. He said, for instance:

Ich halte mich für einen exorbitanten Ausnahmefall. Auf mich ist das Gesetz nicht anwendbar. [...] Wer viel geleistet hat, ist a priori straffrei. Die Pflicht gegen sich selbst ist das Primäre, höher als die Pflicht gegen das Recht. [...] Unsinnig ist der Satz: Es ist alles gleich vor dem Gesetz. Ich bin nicht jedermann. [...] Meine Verhaftung ist nicht nur ein Unglück für mich, es ist ein nationales Unglück. Halbmast hätte man flaggen sollen.⁶

He also claimed that it was his intention to replace the goods sold out of the future profits of his work, which prompted the following illuminating exchange, as reported in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 16 February 1921:

Hier wirft der Vorsitzende ein:

“Sie glaubten also, der Besitzer würde es nicht merken, daß es ein anderes Stück sei?”

Kaiser fährt auf:

“Nicht merken? Ich selber hätte dem Besitzer den Sachverhalt mitgeteilt und der Besitzer würde mir vielleicht gedankt haben, daß er mir die Produktion ermöglichen durfte.”⁷

This display of egocentricity was not by any means unusual. It is evident also in comments made in letters, as, for instance, one written in 1941, where he said:

Ich werde den Deutschen die Luft abschneiden. Für alle Zeiten sind sie gebrandmarkt. Durch einen Deutschen, der alles andere sein will - als ein Deutscher.

Ich bin gesandt, um die Menschheit von einer Pest zu erlösen - und dabei taue ich zum Erlöser wie der Löwe zum Schafhirten. Das ist der Witz der

⁶ Speech reproduced in part in *Werke* 4, 562. He went so far as to say: ‘Ich muß meine Kinder schlachten können, wenn ich an mich glaube’ (563).

⁷ The President of the Court was clearly not impressed by Kaiser’s attitude. Again according to the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 16 February 1921, he asked Kaiser why he had sold the goods and not merely pawned them and, to Kaiser’s response that he got more money from the sale, he said ironically: ‘Also so ganz unwirtschaftlich sind Sie doch nicht!’

Gegensätze - und wenn man sich am ernstesten gebärdet, wird man für sich zur witzigsten Figur.⁸

However, Kaiser's attitude towards his trial and conviction was not only an indication of the value he placed on his own work; it was as much a statement of the supreme importance he attached to the function of the artist (in its general sense) in society – a viewpoint that provides the theme of a number of his plays.

After his release, Kaiser's prolific output continued. Moreover, from 1921 to 1933 his plays enjoyed great popularity, not only in his own country, but all over Europe and overseas – for example, in London, New York, Tokyo, Sydney – as well. However, the advent of the Nazis meant a complete reversal of his fortunes, which Valk succinctly records in the following words:

Er gilt als Kulturbolschewist und wird als Jude bezeichnet. Seine Bücher werden verbrannt, die Aufführung seiner Stücke verboten. Die Preußische Akademie der Künste stößt ihn im Mai 1933 aus. Es setzt eine ungeheure Geldnot ein, die Kaiser an Grünheide fesselt und ihn jetzt gezwungenermaßen zum Einsiedler macht.⁹

During this next period he was in touch with people involved in the anti-fascist underground movement and he wrote anti-fascist pamphlets for distribution. In later life he tended increasingly towards communism.¹⁰

Forewarned of further action to be taken against him, Kaiser left Germany in June 1938 and two months later arrived in Switzerland to begin the period of exile

⁸ Letter 791 to Caesar von Arx [16/5/41].

⁹ Valk (1980b) 19. Kaiser had been elected to the Akademie in 1926.

¹⁰ Marx (1970) 114 (4/3/42).

there that ended only with his death in June 1945. He had hoped, with the help and support of exiles such as Thomas Mann and Albert Einstein, to go from Switzerland to the United States, but he was unable to achieve this. He did actually obtain a visa, but was denied entry after America's declaration of war, on the ground that the presence of his two sons in the German army automatically made him an enemy alien.

None of Kaiser's family accompanied him into exile and he did not see them again. His letters during that period are full of complaints of loneliness, but after his death it became known that throughout his time in Switzerland he had the companionship of his mistress, Maria von Mühlfeld, and their daughter Olivia, born in 1927. Although after Kaiser's death she suggested otherwise, in her letters to a friend at the time Maria von Mühlfeld pictured a relationship marked by unhappiness, not only on account of their financial hardships (Kaiser frequently left behind unpaid accounts for others to settle), but also as a result of his behaviour, and particularly his lack of interest in, and attitude towards, their daughter.

Kaiser had two close friends in Switzerland – Julius Marx, like Kaiser an emigré from his native Germany, and Caesar von Arx, who was a Swiss dramatist. Each of them in his own way was of great assistance to Kaiser, offering him not only the comfort of his friendship (in the latter case mainly through correspondence) but also help with his financial difficulties, his contacts with businessmen and his problems with the Swiss authorities and in relation to the performance of his works. Unfortunately, he kept the two men apart, so much so that a bitter quarrel broke out

between them after his death, because of their conflicting claims in regard to responsibility for his literary estate.

Not surprisingly, Kaiser's letters from the period of exile are punctuated by diatribes against the war. What is surprising, however, is that he was at least as critical of the Allies as of the Germans, if not more so. Marx records that he hated 'die politische Dummheit mehr als die politische Bosheit'.¹¹ This is borne out in his letters. In one he wrote: 'wer zehn Jahre Mord und Folter ermöglicht, ist schlimmer als Mörder und Folterknechte. Deshalb sind die englischen und amerikanischen Politiker die grösseren Verbrecher'.¹² In another he said:

Wann entschliessen sich diese Angloamerikaner zur Einlösung ihre Versprechen? Wann und wie werden die Friedensverbrecher abgeurteilt, die alles soweit kommen liessen? Wann stellt man sie neben die Kriegsverbrecher? Der Tag wird nicht kommen. Die wirklichen Lumpen gehen immer frei aus. In London und Washington wird man keine Galgen errichten.¹³

Kaiser's productivity continued in Switzerland. As well as a number of plays, he wrote one novel and some film scripts, but towards the end of his life his main output consisted of lyrics, of which he wrote about 150. One of the plays he wrote, *Klawitter*, was based on his own difficulties in having his plays produced. As early as 1935, he had suggested to a director that his new play be published under an assumed name,¹⁴ and in 1942 he actually proposed in a letter to Caesar von Arx that the latter

¹¹ Marx (1970) 88 (17/3/41).

¹² Letter 1060 to Julius Marx [23/12/42].

¹³ Letter 1204 to Caesar von Arx [2/11/43].

¹⁴ See Valk (1980b) 20 (the letter quoted is No. 343).

should be named as the author of his latest play.¹⁵ The suggestions came to naught, but Kaiser put them into effect in the play, *Klawitter*, in which he cleverly lampooned the Nazis in their approach to imaginative writing.¹⁶

After *Zweimal Amphitryon* (1943) he wrote only two more plays, *Pygmalion* and *Bellerophon*, the three of them comprising his *Hellenische Trilogie*¹⁷ or (the name under which they were first published) *Griechische Dramen*.¹⁸

At this late stage of his life he was still as convinced as ever of his status as a writer. He reported in a letter to a friend the receipt of a request from Stockholm to submit his 'drei hellenischen Tragödien' to the Committee for the Award of the Nobel Prize.¹⁹ While no source of this news other than Kaiser's letter seems to have survived, he certainly thought of himself as a worthy candidate for that prize. In his earlier years he identified with Plato and, in later life, with Jesus. Julius Marx records:

Georg Kaiser verglich sich selbst gern mit Platon und Jesus. Er als Reinkarnation Platons sei im Jahre 1933 gestorben. Seitdem existiere er als eine Art Reinkarnation Jesu. Er habe wie dieser seine Kräfte dafür verschwendet, seinem Volk das Bild und die Lehre vom 'neuen Menschentum' zu vermitteln, sei aber zum Dank dafür geächtet und vertrieben worden. Ans Kreuz geschlagen hätte ihn jedoch nicht sein Volk, sondern diejenigen, bei denen er

¹⁵ Letter 1059 [22/12/42]. The play was *Die Spieldose*, to be referred to in a later chapter.

¹⁶ *Werke* 6, 309 (1939/40).

¹⁷ *Werke* 6, 427.

¹⁸ *Griechische Dramen*. 1948.

¹⁹ Letter 1466 to Caesar von Arx [8/1/45]. This seems to refer back to an earlier letter in which he told Julius Marx that a large publishing firm in Stockholm had informed him he was suggested for the first Nobel Prize after the war. See Letter 1047 (25/11/42).

Zuflucht gesucht habe.²⁰

Kaiser's comparison of himself with Jesus reminds us of Nietzsche who, at the end of his life, sometimes signed his letters 'Der Gekreuzigte'. Nietzsche had been of great interest to Kaiser in his early life and there is evidence of his influence in a number of the plays.²¹ However, Kaiser read very widely, and he was specially interested in a number of authors. According to Marx:

Wen er gelten läßt, sind Kleist, Hölderlin, Büchner und Brecht. Von Nietzsche will er in letzter Zeit nichts wissen. Jedes Gespräch über Literatur mündet aber zuletzt stets bei Platon.²²

Kaiser's admiration of Hölderlin was not total. On a later date Marx included the following note in his diary:

Georg Kaiser beklagte, daß Hölderlin seinem Enthusiasmus für die Französische Revolution einen leider nur verschwommenen dichterischen Ausdruck gegeben habe.²³

Marx also records the hard words Kaiser used about Schiller, whose 'deklamatorische Bühnenstücke er als ein Greuel der deutschen Literatur bezeichnete'. He excepted only *Wallenstein*, 'dieses Lehrstück von der Macht eines Halbgenies, dessen Größe mit der Unterwürfigkeit seiner Söldnertruppen steht oder fällt'.²⁴

²⁰ Marx (1970) 100 (27/8/41). See also the views expressed by Kieser (1980a) 180 and Valk (1980a) 246.

²¹ Reichert (1964).

²² Marx (1970) 138 (19/8/43). Among other authors of interest to him were Schopenhauer, Dostoyevsky, Gogol and Rilke.

²³ Marx (1970) 146-147 (13/9/44).

²⁴ Marx (1970) 80 (16/2/41).

The influence of Kleist's work based on the *Amphitryon* myth is obvious throughout Kaiser's play, but Kaiser's appreciation of his predecessor went further than that. *Der zerbrochne Krug* is praised in one letter as Kleist's 'unsterbliche Komödie'²⁵ and in another he refers to the dramatist as one who 'das reichste Werk schuf, von dem heute noch die Theater und Verleger leben'.²⁶

Two of Kaiser's plays were inspired by Büchner's *Woyzeck* – namely, *Der Soldat Tanaka* (to be discussed in a later chapter), and *Der Gärtner von Toulouse*.²⁷ In relation to the latter he wrote words of a general significance for his work. He said: 'Das konsequente Drama muss geschrieben werden. Die unerbittliche Dramatik ist notwendig. Inmitten aller Laschheit – Lauheit – Feigheit'.²⁸ Kaiser also wrote of Büchner, in sending a friend a book of his own that he had promised: 'Büchners Werk ist für mich ein Evangelium. Wie soll ich das erklären? Es ist unerklärlich. Oder ist Büchner mein Johannes der Täufer – und ich die Erfüllung?'²⁹

Kaiser's admiration for Brecht was especially aroused by the play *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, of which he wrote:

Ich las es hier und bin bezaubert. Das ist eine Dichtung, die mit Vertrauen erfüllt. Wenn man das könnte. [...] Ein grosser Dichter lebt in dieser Nachtzeit – und das ist Bert Brecht. Amen.³⁰

²⁵ Letter 686 to Caesar von Arx [16/6/40].

²⁶ Letter 1302 to Julius Marx [5/5/44].

²⁷ *Werke* 3, 511 (1937/38).

²⁸ Letter 414 to Richard Révy [10/3/38].

²⁹ Letter 1169 to Frida Haller [August 1943].

³⁰ Letter 1090 to Julius Marx [24/2/43].

The wording of the letter seems to suggest that his interest lay in the work as a literary form.

Kaiser's inability to manage his financial affairs was a serious problem. He always lived beyond his means, because he thought that only right in view of his stature as a writer.³¹ In Switzerland, where his earning capacity was limited, this created serious difficulties for the friends called on to help him to survive. On one occasion a businessman whom Marx had approached for help on Kaiser's behalf refused any assistance, because he said his enquiries showed that 'dieser Georg Kaiser mit Geld nicht umzugehen verstehe. Was er heute erhalten habe, werfe er morgen zum Fenster hinaus'.³² Admittedly, the money was not always spent on himself or his family. Marx records a visit from Maria von Mühlfeld in March 1941, when she told him that since his arrival in Switzerland Kaiser had from his own small means given financial help to eight or ten emigrés there or in the south of France. However, Marx makes the following comment on the source of this impulse:

Er aber spielte also die Rolle eines Grandseigneurs nach zwei Seiten, vor sich und den andern, um zumindest in Geldsachen nicht als kleiner oder gar kleinlicher Bourgeois zu gelten. [...] Es ist deshalb falsch, Georg Kaiser nach konventionellen Maßstäben als unverbesserlichen Lügner zu taxieren³³

Kaiser frequently contemplated suicide, but his need to write was a strong deterrent. However, at one period during his exile, at the end of 1941 and the

³¹ Valk (1980b) 13.

³² Marx (1970) 115 (6/3/42).

³³ Marx (1970) 85 (12/3/41).

beginning of 1942, he seemed determined to put an end to his life. On 23 December 1941 Marx recorded that the lack of several hundred Swiss francs to pay his hotel bill had turned Kaiser's thoughts more and more to suicide, and a fortnight later, on January 6, he further recorded: 'Die Nachrichten über seine Selbstmordabsichten massieren sich', the specific complaint on that occasion being that Kaiser had to wash his own underwear, which was shabby and torn. On 10 January, Marx received a telegram from Kaiser threatening to end his life on the following day at the latest, if there were no change in his circumstances. Marx said he knew it would not really be so soon, or else he would have got together every penny he had and taken it to his friend; and eventually, with the help of Caesar von Arx, he managed to save the situation.³⁴

Strangely, Kaiser had more than once said that he would not survive the war, and his death came just after it finished. He died at Ascona on 4 June 1945, as the result of an embolism. The friend who stood by him throughout his exile, Julius Marx, included in his eulogy at Kaiser's cremation the following summary of the latter's character and place in literature, as he saw them:

An der Bahre dieses großen Mannes und lieben Freundes, der zugleich Offenbarung und Geheimnis war, der mit der linken Hand stets mehr gab, als er mit der rechten empfing, und deshalb so oft in Sorge, Not und Entbehrung lebte - an der Bahre eines der größten Dichter unseres Jahrhunderts, der zwischen Schein und Sein den rechten Weg nicht finden konnte, vielleicht nicht finden wollte, weil er wußte, daß es kein guter Weg sei, verneigen wir uns in Ehrfurcht vor dem unsterblichen Werk, das er uns hinterlassen hat. Denn nichts war ihm so heilig wie sein Werk. In nichts fand man so sehr ihn selbst und die irrlichternde Zweiheit seines reinen Wesens.³⁵

³⁴ Marx (1970) 107 (23/12/41); 108 (6/1/42) and (10/1/42).

³⁵ Marx (1970) 170-171 (8/6/45).

The Play

*Zweimal Amphitryon*³⁶ is one of a long line of works based on the Greek myth concerning the conception of the demi-god, Herakles, as a result of Zeus's seduction (in the guise of her husband) of Alkmene, the wife of the Theban general, Amphitryon. However, even a casual reading of the play reveals that it is very much *sui generis*.

The myth is one of the many stories of Zeus's amorous adventures with a mortal woman and the earlier plays are all built round that central theme. Although Zeus's impersonation of Amphitryon is made possible by the latter's absence at war, in the myth the war itself has no place in the action, and Amphitryon's human qualities as a military ruler are never in doubt. This contrasts with Kaiser's play, where Amphitryon deserts Alkmene at their marriage feast because, when the gifts are brought into the hall, he is so enraptured with the magnificent suit of armour given him by his Captains that he immediately sets off with his army to besiege the neighbouring city of Pharsala. In her despair Alkmene prays to Zeus for death and, when that does not eventuate, asks him to send Amphitryon back to her even as a goatherd, the lowliest of mortals. Zeus is poised to destroy mankind for its sins, but holds his hand when he hears Alkmene's prayer and, in order to test her, descends to earth to visit her in the guise of Amphitryon, and in goatherd attire.

³⁶ *Werke* 6, 429 (July/Nov. 1943).

Meanwhile Amphitryon has finally razed the city of Pharsala, killing every living creature within its walls, and he is shown rejoicing in the carnage and revelling in the smell of burning human flesh. Despite the initial opposition of his Captains, he is bent on continuing his course of destruction. When none of the Officers will undertake the reconnaissance he asks for, he decides to carry it out himself and sets out disguised as a goatherd so that he can pretend he is looking for his lost herd.

Zeus's delight at Alkmene's response to his appearance is such that he gives up his plan for the destruction of mankind, a renewed marriage feast is arranged and, as dancing begins at the end of it, he and Alkmene retire. At the feast he gives an account of what happened in the camp after the fall of Pharsala, but he reverses the roles of Amphitryon and the Captains, claiming that it was they, not he, who wanted to go on to further conquest and that his return to Thebes, alone and attired as he is, was necessary to save his life from the Officers' wrath.

Three of the Elders make their way to the camp in order to confront the Captains, but once there learn from them the true story of their disagreement with Amphitryon and of his embarking on his reconnaissance expedition, and on his return to the camp he is accused of having secretly returned to Thebes in order to further his tyrannical ambitions. He is arrested and taken back to the city, where he is tried for his apparent duplicity and his intention to become a tyrant, and is sentenced to death.

Although the evidence seems to justify his conviction, it is shown to be false when Zeus appears and acknowledges the role he has played. He castigates the

assembled citizens for their sins and then tells them that the child Alkmene is carrying is his, that he will be called Herakles and that it will be his destiny to turn mankind from its sinful ways. Although he strongly condemns Amphitryon's murderous behaviour and intentions, he modifies the sentence imposed on him to one of exile among goatherds until the child is born, during which time he will have to endure the sort of harsh treatment he has in his rage meted out to others. He will, however, be reformed by the experience. Zeus then departs, leaving Alkmene overwhelmed at the miraculous role she is called on to play.

The play was first performed in Zürich on 29 April 1944 and reviewed by Bernhard Diebold, the noted actor and director, in *Die Tat* on 2 May.³⁷ In Diebold's view, the production did not match the play, though he had praise for certain aspects. Kaiser's intention was to have both Amphitryons played by the one person and he had a particular actor in mind.³⁸ This did not eventuate and Diebold's ultimate comment on the two performances was that the actor who played Zeus was 'zu wenig Liebhaber' and the one who played Amphitryon 'zu wenig Soldat'. In reference to the portrayal of Alkmene, he spoke of the actress's 'reiner Erscheinung und vornehmer Tongebung' but commented: '... so wirkte sie doch nur im Tagbild ihres Bewußtseins, verlor sich aber nicht in die Traumgestalt ihrer Nächte'.

He concluded his review in the following words:

Wir wollen uns über diese Bemühung des Schauspielhauses trotz allem Einwand freuen, weil ein Dichtwerk hohen Ranges dem Publikum ins Bewußtsein gespielt wurde - und manch einer, der begeistert klatschte,

³⁷ Diebold (1944) 4.

³⁸ Letter 1237 to Frida Haller [Dec. 1943].

vielleicht jetzt auch zur Lektüre Kaiserscher Dramatik greift. Denn erst in der Verinnerlichung des Lesers erhellen sich ganz die Visionen des Denk-Dichters.

This concurs with Kaiser's view that his plays were simply a means to impart his ideas. He himself wrote in a letter to a director:

Keineswegs habe ich Theaterstücke geschrieben - ich habe mich nur dieser prägnantesten Form bedient, wie Platon seine Dialoge verfasste und aus der Figur den Gedanken ableitete. Das ist Plastik - gestaltete Vision. Drama.³⁹

We do not know the reasons for the enthusiasm of the audience who witnessed that first production. Given the date, it seems most likely that *Amphitryon* reminded them of Hitler. However, Diebold was certainly right in suggesting that a reading of the play is necessary for a better understanding of it, and it poses questions the answers to which depend on a close examination of the text and Kaiser's sources (including his life). That is the task to which the present study is addressed – a task not made easier by the fact that neither in his works nor in his utterances did Kaiser subscribe to accepted values or the dictates of normal logic, though he himself was only partly aware of this.

Shortly after *Zweimal Amphitryon* was completed, Kaiser referred to it in a letter in these terms:

Der Plan dieses Werks entstand im Sommer ganz plötzlich, als ich im Park der Villa Alma mich erging. Man sollte sich fragen, woher die Einfälle kommen. Mir bleibt das ein vollkommenes Rätsel. *Amphitryon* war mir mein Lebtage gleichgültig - an einem Sommernachmittag stellt er sich hin und will beschrieben sein.⁴⁰

³⁹ Letter 757 to Robert S. Pirk (21/2/41).

⁴⁰ Letter 1253 to Hans Feist [Jan. 1944].

In light of the fundamental change that Kaiser has made in the character of Amphitryon, turning him from the more or less conventional creature of his time, as seen in the myth and the plays based on it, into a selfish, power-hungry, and callous conqueror, this is a puzzling statement – not satisfactorily explained by Kaiser's known habit of turning inside out any plot on which a play of his was based. Kaiser's portrait of Amphitryon suggests that the image of Hitler was present to his mind in his portrayal of the character; and the extent to which the latter was a model merits investigation. But the question remains: what was there in the Amphitryon story that could have suggested to Kaiser a link between the impersonated and cuckolded Theban general of literary tradition and a modern dictator currently embarked on a plan of world conquest?

Kaiser's Zeus is also very different from his predecessors – no philanderer, but a judgmental god disgusted with his creation, man. To some extent this change must be connected with the change in Amphitryon, whether as cause or effect. It does, however, raise the question of Kaiser's view of a god who is not only guilty of lying, deception and adultery (not to say, rape), but is despite this prepared to assume the role of a judge towards mankind. Certainly, the divine flaws are present in the myth and earlier plays, but their approach is unlikely to be appropriate in the context in which Kaiser has placed his god. Moreover, in none of them does Zeus appear in the light of a judge in a criminal court. One possibility that should be considered is whether Kaiser deliberately included this ambiguity in the god's role in order to raise doubts about the note of optimism apparent in the play's ending – a note that is in strong contrast to the pessimism that he shows in the slightly earlier play, *Das Floß*

der Medusa.⁴¹ A further question that arises is the extent to which the god's strong condemnation of man for his warlike tendencies is an expression of Kaiser's own views as to the evil of war, and how far he was consistent in his views, in light of his adverse criticism of the Allied forces opposed to Hitler.

As will be clear from the next section, one element in the play that has been given insufficient attention by commentators is what precedes Zeus's final appearance, namely, Amphitryon's trial before the people of Thebes, with its culmination in his conviction and the sentence passed upon him by the Elders. Yet, occupying as it does nearly the whole of the last act, it is a very substantial part of the play, to which Zeus's appearance and replacement of the sentence by the penalty of exile provide a dramatic climax. It is noticeable that the problems on which earlier plays centred – in particular, the issue of adultery – are ignored in *Zweimal Amphitryon*, while, instead, in the trial scene Kaiser brings out strongly the one that lies at the root of those others, namely, man's propensity to base his judgments on what he himself experiences, with its consequence in faulty judgments. It is of help in reaching a full understanding of the play to consider what influences shaped this scene and, in particular, to what extent Kaiser's own experience of the German criminal justice system contributed to it.

The second objective of Zeus's appearance at the end of the play is his announcement that he is the father of Alkmene's expected child. The force of this in

⁴¹ *Werke* 3, 769 (1940/43).

the wider context of the play as a whole has been noted by one commentator, Peter Szondi, in the following terms:

Kaisers Drama wendet sich gegen das Los, das der Sage von der Geburt des Herakles seit Plautus widerfuhr; es will die Entwicklung rückgängig machen, die den Stoff immer mehr der griechischen Mythologie entfremdete, um ihn dem römisch-gallischen Witz zuzueignen.⁴²

It is significant that Kaiser has retained from the myth the fact of Alkmene's virginity before her seduction by Zeus (something that is mostly lost in the plays that followed the myth) but has transformed the role of Herakles, who is now no longer merely a super-hero, but the promised saviour of mankind. That change is not only important for the role of Alkmene in this play but also elevates the ending into an obvious parallel with the Nativity story. Both aspects merit close examination.

In a letter to his daughter, written shortly after completion of the play, Kaiser made this comment:

Vergiss' nicht: die Liebe ist so selten - so ungeheuer selten, dass unter Millionen kaum einer damit rechnen kann ihr zu begegnen. Ich schrieb es jetzt in *Amphitryon* auf und schuf in Alkmene eine seltenste Gestalt.⁴³

An examination of the part played by Alkmene will show the force of this statement.

The significance of the biblical parallel in the ending is of crucial importance to an understanding of the play, but it is clear from the mixed response of critics that it is not easy to interpret. At one time in his early life Kaiser had thoughts of studying

⁴² Szondi (1973) 181.

⁴³ Letter 1213 (14/11/43). In another letter from the same period (No.1207 to Frida Haller [Nov. 1943]) Kaiser said: 'Die Gestalt der Alkmene erscheint mir liebenswert - jedenfalls bedachte ich sie mit allen Zartheiten, die für mich die Liebe umschliesst.'

theology and becoming a minister like his brother Albrecht,⁴⁴ but in later life he became extremely critical of the Christian religion, though he did not cease to use Christian symbols in his works. This aspect of the play will need to be examined carefully, in the light of Kaiser's attitude towards Christianity, as it appears in his works and elsewhere.

Finally, we need to remember that, as has been noted, *Zweimal Amphitryon* is part of a trilogy. The three plays are obviously connected through their common origin in Greek mythology, but there is actually a more substantial link than that, and this also assists in interpreting the play.

⁴⁴ Valk (1980b) 11. An interesting expression of his attitude at that time occurs in a letter quoted by Valk (28), where he said:

Ich weiss, dass in meinen grossen Stunden der reine Gott in meines Leibes Demut sein Gezelt aufschlägt -: ich weiss dass ich sein Wächter bin und will mit aller Kraft den Gott in mir verteidigen -.

The letter, to Otto Liebscher, is No. 198 (9/10/19).

Survey of the Critical Literature

The literature on *Zweimal Amphitryon* is very varied, and its contributions to our understanding of the play are acknowledged in the following survey. Not surprisingly, it will be seen that an important focus of interest has been the relationship of Kaiser's play to other plays on the same subject, in particular Kleist's. The characters of Amphitryon and Alkmene have been thoroughly discussed, and conclusions about them are very similar. The dissimilarity between Zeus's character of an avenging god and the amorous nature of the corresponding role in the myth and earlier plays is not disputed, though the exact effect of the change on his relationship with Alkmene receives little attention. The biblical parallels are commonly referred to, and there is agreement in general over the way the play's ending is to be read. What is most noticeably missing in existing commentaries, however, is adequate analysis of the trial scene, what inspired it, its connection with the problems faced by characters in the earlier plays and with Kaiser's own trial, and its dramatic force in relation to the outcome. Nor is Alkmene's part in it, or any possible conflict between that and the purity or nobility with which she is generally credited (and which admittedly conforms to Kaiser's idea of her), analysed by any of the critics. With the exception of one writer, who does not take the matter far enough, no one has thought to question the inspiration for Kaiser's fundamental change in the character of Amphitryon. Writers take it as read that the play was designed to give vent to his hatred of war by showing it in its very worst aspects, but do not consider what might have moved him to choose for the title role a legendary character so very different from the image he wished to present to the reader. Moreover, the possibility of a

detailed correspondence between Kaiser's *Amphitryon* and the prime target of his attack, Adolf Hitler, has not been the subject of investigation. Finally, any discussion of the effect of the other two plays in the trilogy on the interpretation of the role of Herakles and the ultimate meaning of the play is also missing from the commentaries.

Though some of the writings on *Zweimal Amphitryon* are considerable, others amount to little more than a brief synopsis of the play, or a short comment in the course of an article on a wider topic. Bernhard Diebold's review of the first performance of the play is referred to earlier in the Introduction, and relevant comments from the following are quoted in the text – Caesar von Arx, Nachwort to *Griechische Dramen* (1948), Walther Huder, 'Vorstoss ins Religiöse: Zu Fragmenten Georg Kaisers aus dem Exil' (1957) and 'Die politischen und sozialen Themen der Exil-Dramatik Georg Kaisers' (1961), Wolfgang Wittkowski, *Heinrich von Kleists 'Amphitryon': Materialien zur Rezeption und Interpretation* (1978), and Wulf Koepke, 'Georg Kaisers Dramen nach 1938: Gegenentwurf zum Leben' (1980).

Of the more substantial treatments of the subject, the most significant are two of the early ones – the chapters devoted to the play in Hansres Jacobi's *Amphitryon in Frankreich und Deutschland* (1952) and Örjan Lindberger's *The Transformations of Amphitryon* (1956 trans.) – and the later discussion by Peter Szondi, in the section headed 'Fünfmal Amphitryon: Plautus, Molière, Kleist, Giraudoux, Kaiser' in his *Lektüren und Lektionen* (1973).

The main feature of Jacobi's work is his comparison of Kaiser's play with that of Kleist, though he also makes many points through his comparisons with the work of the French writers, particularly Kaiser's near contemporary, Giraudoux. It is in comparison with Giraudoux that he sums up Kaiser's play. He says:

[Kaiser] schuf also nicht wie Giraudoux eine Welt poetisierter Wirklichkeit, sondern eine entwirklichte Welt der Poesie, die in keiner direkten Beziehung zu unserem Jahrhundert steht.

(109)

Jacobi's comments on the essential nature of the three main characters are typical of the way they are seen by following writers. He notes the difference between the divine and adulterous 'Don Juan' of the earlier plays, who comes to earth in order to enjoy a night's pleasure and to father a son, and Kaiser's punitive god, whose aim is to test Alkmene but who is diverted into offering her comfort and love and then (having prepared the way at the renewed wedding feast) turns to disciplining her husband.

Alkmene, through whom Zeus experiences the blessing of human love and is softened in the process, is seen as the 'Inbegriff der Reinheit' (101), who lives wholly in her love for Amphytrion and blames herself for the humiliation she has suffered through him. As a 'völlig gefühlsbetonte' character (102), she resembles Kleist's Alkmene, but is sharply contrasted with Giraudoux's self-confident heroine, whose clear reason even infuses her love. The purity of Kaiser's heroine renews Zeus's faith in mankind and the son she will bear will be the leader of a better race of men.

Amphitryon is no longer 'der unbedeutende Adelige' of Molière (102), nor Kleist's somewhat rough general, nor is he the good-natured lover to be seen in Giraudoux's play, but a ruthless, high-handed commander, spoilt by fame, to whom war means everything and love little. He is a typical representative of the people whose evil deeds almost led to their destruction, and his penance is to spend time as a goatherd, in order to learn to live in peace and love. The way in which this play – a play in which the contrasting elements of armour and goatskin act as symbols for war and peace, for hate and love – differs in its ending from those of Molière, Kleist and Giraudoux marks it as a play about guilt and atonement.

Jacobi comments that Kaiser must have felt himself closest to Kleist, with whom he shared not only a deep seriousness (he abjures the comedy of the earlier plays), but other features that mark him out as very much a German writer and are alien to the Frenchman, Giraudoux. On this point, he refers to Kaiser's lack of restraint, not only in placing Alkmene in a life-threatening situation (as Kleist did), but also in his portrayal of Amphitryon, particularly when he is exulting over the fate of Pharsala, and in his picture of an Alkmene lacking balance and moderation in her expression of her feelings. Kaiser's romantic attitude to nature, 'der Ausdruck einer gottgewollten Harmonie und organischen Ordnung' (113), is also seen as Kleistian and German, as he pictures wild mountain country and lonely woodland – an uncultivated German landscape, very different from the fields and gardens of France. Finally, there is the author's approach to love and sex, resembling Kleist's but, in its seriousness and idealism, in the picture of a woman worshipping her husband as a god, a strong contrast to Giraudoux's light-hearted, even frivolous treatment of the

theme. Jacobi also suggests that Amphitryon's lack of understanding of the Captains' wish to return to their wives in Thebes is an illustration of the smaller role love plays in German, as compared to French, life; and he remarks on the impossibility of a French author seriously portraying a man voluntarily abandoning his wife for war on their wedding night, without having first consummated the marriage. He notes, on the other hand, what he refers to as German inhibitions about erotic features – the discreet departure of Zeus and Alkmene from the wedding feast, for instance.

Elsewhere in his book, Jacobi claims that one of the stories in the collection of tales and fables dating back to the 13th or 14th century and known as the *Gesta Romanorum* – the story of the Emperor Jovinianus – is actually a mediaeval version of the Amphitryon myth. Although this is not accepted by others, it points the way to an alternative source for Kaiser's play, the idea being taken up by Lindberger, who is next to be considered.

The chapter on *Zweimal Amphitryon* in Lindberger's book *The Transformations of Amphitryon* makes an important contribution to any consideration of the work, despite the fact that much of the chapter is devoted to a synopsis of the play and an account of Kaiser's life. The most significant features of Lindberger's survey are to be found in his suggestion of an alternative source for the play and in his summing-up. First, however, some of the particular comments he has made should be noted. He refers to the resemblance between Kaiser's Alkmene and Kleist's, not only in the way in which each relates to the god's appearance, but also in their emotional nature and their indifference to honour and fame; but, although he

comments that Kaiser does not present us with an Alkmene torn to pieces by her situation, his suggestion that her problems, which Zeus solves by leaving her, seem to have been lifted from Kleist is a little difficult to understand, in view of the difference in the way the plot develops in each case.

He notes the comparison with a 1621 play by Johannes Burmeister – *Sacri Mater Virgo* – which presents the myth in terms of the Nativity story, and which is discussed in the text. He also points to Zeus's resemblance to the biblical God, but comments that it is nevertheless highly unbiblical that it is through love of a noble woman that mankind is forgiven; Alkmene, not the semi-divine Herakles, is the saviour. His description of Alkmene's part in the play after the end of the wedding feast as 'insignificant' (209), though it probably relates solely to her actual speaking part, is unfortunate in view of what will be seen as her very influential role in Amphytrion's disgrace, in her repetition of the words spoken in his name by Zeus when he is leaving her after their night together.

Lindberger suggests that *Zweimal Amphytrion* is a play to be read rather than watched – though parts are effective, others, particularly the repetitions of events in the camp, are tedious, not well designed for the theatre. His view is that, despite its Greek costume, *Zweimal Amphytrion* is un-Greek in spirit, much more similar in fact to a mediaeval morality play. He considers it really belongs in an alternative literary tradition, that seems to have its origin in Indian fairy tales, and that includes the story (mentioned by Jacobi) of the Emperor Jovinianus, which concerns a presumptuous ruler who, as divine punishment for his sin of pride, is temporarily ousted by a double

and made to earn his return through repentance. Lindberger's research does not go far enough, but the suggestion is very important and is thoroughly discussed in an early chapter.

Lindberger ascribes the impetus for the play to Kaiser's detestation of the Hitler regime and his concern to find a platform from which to condemn it. However, he does not indicate any direct comparisons with Hitler, other than to describe *Amphitryon* as having 'the characteristics of a modern dictator conducting reprisals against an inferior state which has declined to make its population available for slave labour' (206). He sees the influence of Kaiser's hatred of the Nazis in the change in tone of his final works, brought about by the introduction of firm moral norms. This change he traces back to the plan for a play that was being considered in 1940, in which God was to come to earth to observe the infamy of man and that was to conclude with His final abandonment of His creation.⁴⁵ However, Lindberger claims that Kaiser has subsequently modified his position through his recognition of the existence of certain positive moral values in man. The result is to be seen in the replacement of the 'ice-cold atmosphere' of some earlier plays (222) by a degree of interest in, and sympathy for, other people.

Szondi, who describes Kaiser's play as 'das düsterste aller überlieferten *Amphitryon*-Werke' (181), also suggests that it is 'nicht nur die antikisierendste, sondern zugleich die zeitgebundenste aller *Amphitryon*-Variationen' (181) (the latter part a contrast with Jacobi's view). He makes a number of very trenchant comments

⁴⁵ See reference to *Die göttliche Tragödie* in Chapter VIII.

on the play. For instance he points out that Kaiser has created a work that is much closer to the original myth than are the earlier plays, mentioning in particular the omission of their comic aspects and the inclusion of Amphitryon's motive for going to war (largely disregarded in the comedies), where Kaiser inverts Hesiod's motive so that the war becomes not the means to a greater end – the winning of Alkmene – but the end itself. He notes the significance of the armour given to Amphitryon, in relation to the prize that, in the earlier plays, he brings back from war, and suggests that the Captains have led him astray as he later does them. He comments on Amphitryon's sudden rage and as sudden return to normality and compares it with the 'hysterische Querulanz' (182) that almost encompassed the downfall of an entire nation; and he argues that Zeus's inversion of events in the camp is a true version of the situation in the mouth of the god. All these points are noted in the text.

Szondi's final comment is that the conjunction of Zeus's appearance as a goatherd in response to Alkmene's prayer and Amphitryon's donning of goatherd attire as a cunning ruse points to the problem of the idealistic drama at this time – 'des Versuchs, Verbrechen und Humanität in einem Kunstwerk darzustellen, als wären es beide Ideen' (184).

The discussion on *Zweimal Amphitryon* in Margaret Kober Merzbach's 1955 article on Kaiser's use of the double motif in his later years – 'Die Wandlungen des Doppelgänger-motivs in Georg Kaisers letzten Werken' – centres on the contrast with Kaiser's novel *Villa Aurea*. In summing up the play she comes to the following conclusion:

Am Ende seines Lebensweges hat der Dichter Georg Kaiser, der nicht Vergebung wollte, sich dennoch auf das Christuswort besonnen: Vater, vergib ihnen; denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun.

(105)

Through human love and divine grace, the false goal of the warmonger becomes the alternative path of his other self, the guardian of life.

Ian C. Loram in 'Georg Kaiser's Swan Song: "Griechische Dramen"' (1957) discusses the three plays in the trilogy and comes to the conclusion that, though they are all concerned with the theme of the 'new man', Kaiser now sees that 'the "Erneuerung" can come only through grace', that, in place of the 'emphasis on the "flight from reality into illusion" [...] one must see here the flight into the only true reality – away from the illusion of the world' (30). In his specific discussion of *Zweimal Amphitryon* he comments that it has none of the wit or humour of Molière, Kleist or Giraudoux. 'It is from beginning to end deadly serious, despite the seemingly absurd ending' (27). One cannot compare the 'reine Menschlichkeit' of Iphigenie with the character of Alkmene, whose humanity 'lies simply in the fact that she is a woman who loves' (27). He adds that the fact that she 'appears so infrequently in the play is an indication that Kaiser was not primarily interested in her effect upon her husband' (27); he is concerned with 'Gnade', rather than 'Menschlichkeit'. Loram also describes it as a shock to learn that the Olympic Games are to be the remedy for the world's ills (as Zeus proclaims at the end), and says that, though some of Kaiser's statements might be cited to justify this, it is still odd.

In her article entitled 'Some Thoughts on Kleist's *Amphitryon* and Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon*' (1960), Marianne Jetter writes at some length on the

resemblances and the differences between the two plays, but the view she takes is not always easy to understand. She contrasts Kaiser's original treatment of the theme, 'to illustrate so-called modern "civilization" as he sees it, its fate and future' (178), with Kleist's adaptation of Molière's play, on which the author's own personal problems have had an influence. Here, she refers to the question of whether man's actions are governed by reason or emotion and the problem of the human tendency to rely on the evidence of one's senses – though in the context the two problems seem to be very much the same. She attributes the distress and confusion of Kleist's heroine to her attempts to reason out the situation instead of relying solely on her feelings, and suggests that in Kaiser's play the problem is transferred to the Elders. Thus, she says: 'Kaiser inadvertently acknowledges the danger of relying entirely on reasoning power which at times might even add to confusion' (181) (emphasis added), overlooking the very clear signals he gives of his understanding of the problem that lies at the heart of the confusion and incomprehension in both plays.

She notes the part played by consciousness of guilt in each work. Kleist's Alkmene is seen by Zeus as guilty because her excessive love for her husband causes her to see his countenance in that of the god, whereas Kaiser's heroine accuses herself on account of her sensuousness and lack of restraint in her love for Amphytrion. Her love, that 'strikes the reader as divine' (185), nevertheless turns out to be her strength, 'for the poet feels that it has become nullified by her own acknowledgment and the fact that she was even prepared to die for it' (180). Amphytrion in this play has no insight into his own sins, which result from a lack of humanity, but Kleist's Amphytrion eventually recognizes his failing in not having trusted a creature as pure

as his wife. Jetter is critical of this *Amphitryon*, of what she terms the 'rather ridiculous means' he employs to regain his identity and the way his language concerning Alkmene becomes 'coarse' (182), and argues that Kleist was concerned with the problem of the inequality between the two characters and the 'conviction of the existence of true love which should be assumed under all circumstances' (187). Kaiser, however, was concerned in addition with the moral deterioration of the times, and the message of his play is that love between human beings is no longer adequate to deal with the situation. Herakles can be seen as a symbol for Christ, which implies that man's redemption is now dependent on a metaphysical power and love must be blessed by divine grace.

Jetter's verdict is that 'Kaiser's play stirs the reader more deeply than Kleist's but it hardly entertains him as much' (187). Nevertheless, she sees a certain amount of comedy in the play, mostly through the theme of the goats. She cites, for instance, 'the strong soldiers hanging on to the goats' tails' (188), which is surely a misreading of the incident, and even finds Zeus's inversion of events in camp after the battle an amusing feature. She also suggests that, though Mercury has no part in *Zweimal Amphitryon*, some of his mischievousness may have been incorporated in the play through the attribution to Zeus of some of the characteristics of Mercury's son, Pan, who is often depicted with the lower limbs and the horns of a goat. This seems a sorry reading of Zeus's role in the play.

Kaiser's 1971 biographer, Ernst Schürer, describes the play as Kaiser's 'final protest against militarism' (170). He points to two other themes intertwined in it – the

salvation of the world by a pure woman and the promised birth of a child as the future redeemer – and concludes that the ‘curse of war destroys all that is good in man; it can only be overcome if love, as exemplified by Alkmene, rules the world. And a new world can only be created by individuals; therefore it must be started by a single man, the child’ (171). In the earlier biography, by B. J. Kenworthy (1957), the play is included in the chapter on ‘The Artist’, but the discussion on this aspect relates mainly to the other two plays in the trilogy. Kenworthy’s summing-up of *Zweimal Amphitryon* is that it ‘infuses into the legend of Alcmene and Amphitryon the idea of the regeneration of a man through the love of a pure woman; and through this love, of the whole of humanity, as it is represented in the figure of the proud, power-hungry soldier, Amphitryon’ (172).

The writer of the discussion on *Zweimal Amphitryon* in *Amphitryon: Three Plays in New Verse Translations* by Charles E. Passage and James H. Mantinband (1974) describes the play as impressive (though perhaps marred by ‘bluntness of message and by undistinguished verse’ (292)) and as ‘dramatically powerful and conceived with brilliant originality’ (292). In his view, the role of Alkmene is subordinated to that of Zeus and Amphitryon, on whom almost the entire story depends. From the reference to a shift in dramatic weight among the main characters, it appears that this statement relates to the extent of Alkmene’s speaking role, not to her importance to the plot. He refers to the biblical parallels, which extend beyond the Annunciation, and comments that ‘this Zeus, who is a god of righteousness, is deflected from his destructive purposes, not by finding one upright man, but by experiencing the love of a mortal woman’ (292). He sees no comedy in the play,

which he describes as a play of men and ideas, not of romantic love; all the rest is 'goat song' – *trag-oedeia*, and Greek. He notes a post-chivalric attitude towards women in Alkmene's role. His comments on Kaiser's lack of aesthetic objectivity, as compared to Euripides in *The Trojan Women*, are discussed in the text.

The reference to 'goat song' – *trag-oedeia* – is apparently taken up in a comparatively recent article, John O. Buffinga's 'From "Bocksgesang" to "Ziegenlied": The Transformation of a Myth in Georg Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon*' (1986). Buffinga discusses in detail the proposition that, in 'recreating the ancient legend of Amphitryon, and combining it with the motif of the goat, Kaiser transforms a pre-Plautine "Bocksgesang" or tragedy into a generically hybrid, twentieth century "Ziegenlied"' (490). The rest of his article largely repeats the comments of earlier critics. However, he stresses the importance of the motif of the double, which he notes virtually spans Kaiser's entire literary output and which 'remains a symbol of the regeneration of man: man is continuously involved in a process of becoming somebody else' (480). He discusses a number of the related dualities, for instance, those between illusion and reality, war and peace, guilt and innocence, the Judaeo-Christian and Hellenic traditions and between comedy and tragedy, as well as the triple distinction between man as a god, man as man and man as an animal. He notes the biblical parallels and agrees with the view that in this play Kaiser is now saying that the regeneration of man can only come through grace. Like Marianne Jetter, he sees comedy in the goat theme, in Zeus's appearance in herdsman's attire, in the part played by the goats in the victory over Pharsala and in Zeus's inversion of events in

the camp afterwards. Buffinga also discusses the play's relationship with Franz Werfel's *Bocksgesang* (1921).

In relation to the sources, there is a very good account of the literary history and development of the Greek myth surrounding the conception of Herakles, which is obviously an important source of the play, in Lindberger's book, in Passage and Mantinband and in L. R. Shero's 'Alcmene and Amphytryon in Ancient and Modern Drama' (1956). The parallels to the Old and New Testaments, that are also an important source, are commonly noted in the critical literature. In her dissertation – 'Die Quellen zu Georg Kaisers Stücken' (1971) – which, as its name implies, is concerned only with the sources, Edith Lach notes as the main source the account of the myth of Zeus's visit to Alkmene given in Hesiod's *Aspis Herakleous*. She notes also the biblical parallels, and refers to Johannes Burmeister's play *Sacri Mater Virgo*, mentioned above. However, her comment that *Zweimal Amphytryon* follows the old myth in making Zeus come to earth in order to father a redeemer of mankind does not accord with Zeus's explanation to the Thebans of the events leading to his decision to make the descent; and several other comments suggest an inadequate knowledge of the play. Moreover, she indicates her unawareness of Kaiser's attitude to war by her suggestion that the pacifism evident at the end was probably due to Kaiser's desire to invert the motif to be found in Giraudoux's play, where the unwarlike Amphytryon is propelled into a war instigated by the gods to enable Jupiter to enjoy a night of love with Alkmene. Comparing Kaiser's work to Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, she comments that Kaiser replaces Brecht's irony with a religious hope for a better world.

Let us now summarize those aspects of the play that have been inadequately analysed and are thus in particular need of further investigation:

1 There is no comment on the actual trial scene. More than one commentator mentions Zeus's engineering of it, through his account of what transpired in camp after the battle, but the scene itself is glossed over, and what inspired it, its connection with the problems faced by characters in the earlier plays and with Kaiser's own trial, and its dramatic force in relation to the outcome are not discussed.

2 Alkmene's part in the trial is small, but crucial. However, no consideration is given to it, in particular to the possible effect of her evidence in relation to the commonly accepted description of her as 'pure' or 'noble' – though this undoubtedly conforms to Kaiser's idea of her.

3 With the exception of Lindberger's incomplete investigation, there is no inquiry into a possible source of Kaiser's fundamental change in the character of Amphitryon and his reason for choosing for the title role a legendary character so very different from the image he wished to present to the reader.

4 The possibility of a strong correspondence between Kaiser's Amphitryon and Adolf Hitler has not been the subject of investigation, although it is obvious that the play is in part a vigorous attack on the late dictator.

5 The effect of the change in Zeus's character as compared with the myth and earlier plays, and its relevance to his relationship with Alkmene and in the context of his intervention in Amphitryon's trial, is not subjected to a full examination.

6 Finally, *Zweimal Amphitryon* is part of a trilogy, but there is no examination of the extent to which this might affect the interpretation of the role of Herakles in particular and, through him, of the ultimate meaning of the play.

To investigate these areas further is the purpose of the present study.

Chapter I – *The Amphitryon Myth in Literature*

According to the mythology centred on the circumstances surrounding the conception of the demi-god Herakles, as it developed, Zeus seduced Alkmene in the guise of her husband, Amphitryon, when he was away fighting. Hence, the title given to Kaiser's play would seem to place it firmly in the literary tradition springing from the myth. There is also the evidence of Kaiser's own statement, quoted in the Introduction, as to the origin of his play. It is a question, however, whether the conclusion is justified by the evidence. Bearing in mind that Kaiser was not noted for faithful adherence to his ostensible sources, we need to investigate the extent to which he did in fact follow that particular tradition and to consider what might have been the inspiration for the various changes he made. To do this we need first to examine in some detail the course of development of the myth and of the literary works that have been based on it.

The Greek Mythology

According to the historian Herodotus, Amphitryon was a real person. Writing in the 5th century B.C., Herodotus claims that he himself

... saw Cadmeian characters engraved upon some tripods in the temple of Apollo Ismenias in Bœotian Thebes, most of them shaped like the Ionian. One of the tripods has the inscription following:-

'Me did Amphitryon place, from the far Teleboans coming.'

This would be about the age of Laius, the son of Labdacus, the son of Polydorus, the son of Cadmus.¹

¹ Herodotus V, 59, quoted also in Passage & Mantinband (1974) 4. That work, together with Lindberger's *The Transformations of Amphitryon* (1956), is the source of much of the information in the following pages.

On this basis, Alkmene may well have been a real person also, in view of the evidence in the legends that she and Amphitryon were cousins,² but her visitation by Zeus is clearly the stuff of myth.

The story of the paternity of Herakles is part of the Greek oral tradition that has come down to us through the works of those authors whose poems were first recorded in written form. Homer, for example, makes reference to it in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the 14th Book of the *Iliad* Zeus recites a list of the women he has loved – a most impressive list – when telling his wife Hera how strong is his desire for her at that moment, and included in the list is ‘Alkmene in Thebe,/ when Alkmene bore me a son, Herakles the strong-hearted ...’.³ And in the 11th Book of the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus is describing to Alcinous and his court his meeting with the souls of the dead, he tells how ‘... I saw Amphitryon’s wife, Alkmene,/ who, after lying in love in the embraces of great Zeus,/ brought forth Herakles, lion-hearted and bold of purpose’.⁴

There is no mention here of any deception of Alkmene, nor of a number of other features that play a prominent part in the various literary works that have been written on this theme. However, there are other writings in which these details are

² An important source of the evidence is the work known as *The Library* of Apollodorus. The actual author of this work is unknown but the name of Apollodorus, the Athenian grammarian of the second century B.C. to whom it was first attributed, is still attached to it by convention. For the evidence of the relationship, see Apollodorus (1921) I, 163 and 165.

³ Homer (1951) 14, 323-324.

⁴ Homer (1975) 11, 266-268.

provided. Among these is the poem known as the *Catalogue of Women* or *Ehoiai*, formerly attributed to Hesiod but now generally regarded as the work of a later author, probably of the sixth century B.C.⁵ One section of the Catalogue was at some point added as an introduction to another poem earlier attributed to Hesiod, *Aspis Herakleous* (the Shield of Herakles), which takes its name from the detailed description of a magnificent shield made for Herakles by Hephaestus, or Vulcan.

This introduction gives an account of the circumstances surrounding Herakles' birth and from it we learn that Alkmene was the daughter of Elektryon, who was killed by Amphytryon, who then had to leave the land of his fathers and go to Thebes. Alkmene, a woman of unrivalled beauty, went with him as his bride, but Amphytryon had to agree that their marriage would not be consummated until he had overcome the Teleboans and Taphians in revenge for the murder of her brothers. Meanwhile, however,

the father of gods and mortals
was weaving another design in his mind,
how, both for gods
and for men who eat bread,
he might plant a protector against destruction.⁶

The poem goes on to refer to his 'mulling over/ in the mind his deception' (which could well be his assumption of the likeness of Amphytryon) and then describes how, leaving Olympus, he came down to earth and made love to Alkmene in her husband's absence. That same night Amphytryon returned victorious from his encounter with the Teleboans and Taphians and eagerly availed himself of the right he now had to share

⁵ West (1985) 136.

⁶ Hesiod (1973) 192 (lines 27-29).

her bed. In due course Alkmene produced twin sons, the one Herakles, sired by Zeus, the other the child of her husband, Amphitryon.

The story of the twin births is not universally accepted and is noticeably absent from Homer's reference in the *Iliad* to the birth of Herakles.⁷ In that version Agamemnon relates how Zeus made an announcement to the assembled gods that a certain child just about to be born would rule over 'all those dwelling about him'. However, his failure to identify the child as Alkmene's son, merely referring obliquely to one of his own blood, enabled his wife Hera to retard the birth of Herakles and advance the birth of another child descended from Zeus's son Perseus (as Herakles would be through both his parents), so that it was that child to whom his promise of lordship then applied.

Further details of Zeus's seduction of Alkmene emerge in the work of a man by the name of Pherecydes writing in the 5th Century B.C., though unfortunately his work is preserved only in fragments. From one of these fragments (13b), which has been preserved in an Alexandrian commentary on the reference to Alkmene in the *Odyssey*, we are told of Alkmene's refusal to consummate her marriage until Amphitryon has avenged the death of her brothers, of Zeus's visit to her in disguise (presumably the likeness of her husband) and of his presentation to her of a drinking cup which had been the property of King Pterelaus of the Teleboans, and which

⁷ Homer (1951) 19, 100-125.

therefore gave proof of a victorious end to the battle undertaken to avenge the deaths.⁸

The Library of Apollodorus (already cited), which probably dates from the first or second century A.D.,⁹ is another important source of information about the Greek myths. It refers to Pherecydes and seems to have obtained much of its information from him. In relating the story of Zeus's visit to Alkmene in the likeness of Amphitryon it adds the detail that Zeus ordered the night to be extended threefold in order to make his time with her as long as possible. Whether this was gleaned from Pherecydes is not clear.

Mention of Zeus's assumption of the likeness of Amphitryon also occurs in Pindar's *Odes*, written in the first half of the 5th century B.C. Two of the odes – *Isthmian Ode 7* and *Nemean Ode 10* – make reference to the story of Zeus's visit to Alkmene. In the latter, in a hymn of praise of the city of Argos, we are told:

She bred that warrior soul
Amphitryon, whose race received the god
Of strength supreme, when in bronze arms he slew
The Teleboai; for great Zeus
Taking his likeness, brought the seed
Of Heracles the dauntless to his chamber ...¹⁰

⁸ Lindberger (1956) 21; Passage & Mantinband (1974) 7.

⁹ Michael Simpson in his translation entitled *Gods and Heroes of the Greeks: The Library of Apollodorus* (Amherst, 1976) notes that the book was most likely written in the first century A.D. and in any event no earlier than the first century B.C. (Intro. 1). In the Loeb Classical Library translation the middle of the first century B.C. is suggested as the earliest possible date of composition, with the first or second century A.D. the more probable (Apollodorus (1921) Intro. xi & xvi). See Intro. xix for the statement about Pherecydes.

¹⁰ Pindar (1972) 222. See also p. 221.

Pindar also describes the earliest of Herakles' exploits, performed in infancy. In *Nemean Ode 1*, he tells how Zeus's consort, Hera, angry at the birth of the hero, sent serpents to attack him in his cradle, but they were no match for the young child.¹¹

One to each hand he seized - those hands
Invincible - the necks of the two snakes,
And hanging there
Throttled within his grip, the flying minutes
Strained from these monsters' forms their breath of life.¹²

The European Plays

The earliest surviving play dealing with the legend is Plautus' *Amphitruo*, first produced in Rome about 200 B.C., but it is known from fragments and references in other works that this was preceded by several Greek versions, both tragic and comic.¹³

Even Plautus' script is not complete, an estimated 300 lines towards the end of the play having been lost. The lacuna was credibly filled in the 15th century by Cardinal Hermolaus Barbarus and the added lines were regularly included in printed editions of the play up to the middle of the 19th century, so that later authors would

¹¹ According to Pindar, this happened just after Herakles' birth. He describes the serpents as 'thirsting to fold upon the babes new-born'. Pindar (1972) 172 (*Nemean Ode 1*). However, eight months is the age given in *The Library*, which also quotes Pherecydes as saying that it was Amphitryon who put the serpents in the bed, so that he could tell which child was which (a reversal of the situation in the plays, where it is Amphitryon himself who has to be identified). A footnote states that, according to Theocritus, the baby was ten months old at the time - Apollodorus (1921) I, 175.

¹² Pindar (1972) 172). (*Nemean Ode 1*).

There are a number of other references that could be cited for the myth (see, for example, Passage & Mantinband (1974) 5-9, particularly the last paragraph on p. 9), but the ones quoted have been chosen to give a complete picture from the earliest writers.

¹³ Shero (1956) 194-202. This is a very full record of the dramatic works on this subject. See also Lindberger (1956) 22-24.

have treated them as genuine.¹⁴

*Amphitruo*¹⁵ opens with a prologue by Mercury,¹⁶ in which he describes the play as a tragi-comedy. This classification was, however, designed for a Roman audience – it was based on the fact that there are both gods and slaves in it and in the Roman theatre tragedy was considered the form for plays about gods and important people and comedy the one for slaves and lesser mortals. In fact, the play is elsewhere referred to as a *comoedia* (88, 868) and this is entirely appropriate, since the tragic potential is never realized.

The comedy, not to say farce, is provided by two characters who have no place in the myth – the god Mercury and Amphitryon's slave Sosia. Mercury is present in order to ensure that his father, Jupiter, is able to enjoy his lovemaking undisturbed. To achieve this he transforms himself into the image of Sosia, as Jupiter has of Amphitryon, so that the confusion of identity between Jupiter and Amphitryon is paralleled by that between Mercury and Sosia, but in a comic, rather than serious, fashion. And Mercury in the prologue informs the audience that they will always be able to recognize the gods, as Jupiter will have a golden tassel on his hat and Mercury little winglets on his – in each case invisible to the other characters on the stage.

¹⁴ Lindberger (1956) 41.

¹⁵ Plautus (T. Macci Plavti) 1, 1.

¹⁶ For convenience, this form will be used throughout the text, as also the spelling 'Sosia' for the name of Amphitryon's slave, and the spellings 'Amphitryon' 'Alkmene' and 'Herakles', as in Kaiser, for those characters. Zeus will be referred to by the Roman name, 'Jupiter', in discussing any work in which that is the form adopted but otherwise by the Greek name, 'Zeus', which is Kaiser's choice.

At the opening of the play Jupiter is with Alkmene but apparently not by any means for the first time, as Mercury tells us that she is pregnant to his father, as well as to her husband, Amphitryon, and, moreover, that she will give birth to twins that very night. This has been arranged by Jupiter so that no-one thereafter will suspect Alkmene of adultery.

From Sosia we learn that Amphitryon is about to return home, having overcome the Teleboeans in battle, killed their king, Pterelas, and for his bravery been presented with a golden goblet that the king used to drink from. Sosia also comments that Nocturnus, the God of Night, must be drunk, as the Big Dipper hasn't moved at all – a reference to the long night of myth.

When Amphitryon appears with Sosia shortly after Jupiter's departure, he is dismayed to find his wife less than welcoming on his return from the war and she is astonished that he has come back, as she thinks, so soon after telling her he had to get back to the army; and misunderstandings turn to acrimonious exchanges, including a specific charge of adultery. The situation is in no way helped by the discovery that Alkmene not only knows all about the battle, but already has the goblet presented to Amphitryon, although it had been sealed in a case which Sosia is carrying and which now proves to be empty. After angry talk of divorce, Amphitryon leaves to obtain a witness to his not having been home the previous night.

The play continues with Jupiter returning in order to appease Alkmene, and

managing to achieve a reconciliation, and Amphitryon being refused entry to his own home by Mercury/Sosia.¹⁷ There are further complications, but they are eventually all resolved. A maidservant reports the birth of twins to Alkmene and the appearance of two serpents, which were strangled by one of the babies, and also Jupiter's announcement that he was Alkmene's secret lover and that the baby who strangled the serpents was his. At the very end his voice is heard telling Amphitryon that the child will live to win immortal glory for his foster-father's name and Amphitryon professes himself satisfied with the situation.

This play, which has set the tone for almost all subsequent versions, has been followed by numerous translations and versions, as Giraudoux playfully suggested when in 1929 he called his play *Amphitryon* 38.¹⁸ The summary that follows is not exhaustive, referring only to those plays that have any features of relevance to a consideration of Kaiser's play.

Several plays in the 15th and 16th centuries raised the interesting question of the morality of the god's behaviour. Pandolfo Collenuccio in 1491 and Luis de Camões in the 1540's both showed Amphitryon less than happy with what had happened: and Juan Timoneda in 1559 included an express condemnation of Jupiter and Mercury for their actions.¹⁹

¹⁷ An episode that is accepted as having inspired a similar scene in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (III, 1).

¹⁸ How Giraudoux arrived at the figure 38 is not known and to-day it is no longer included in the title.

¹⁹ Information about these plays has been obtained from Wittkowski (1978) 29-30.

One of the most interesting of the 17th century plays, in the light of Kaiser's treatment of the myth, is one that appeared in 1621 – Johannes Burmeister's *Sacri Mater Virgo* – which gave a distinct twist to the old story. There is no evidence that Kaiser had ever heard of this work but it has significant parallels in the later play which make it possible, if not probable, that he had. Lindberger describes it in the following words:

The author was a priest, and it was his ambition to create a 'comedy converted from Plautus to Christ' – as he says in the dedication to Adolph Friedrich, Duke of Mecklenburg.

The basic principle of Burmeister's 'conversion' is that Mary has been substituted for Alcumena and Jesus for Hercules. Jupiter's part has been assumed by the Holy Ghost, Amphitruo's by Joseph. The part of Mercury has been divided among the Arch-Angel Gabriel, who *i.a.* reads the prologue, and Asmodes, a devil, who executes the more malevolent tricks.²⁰

Through the activities of Asmodes (who assumes the shape of Sosia on occasions) Mary is suspected of adultery, not merely by Joseph at first, but also by the clergy. However, the truth – that the coming child is the son of God – is made known to Joseph in a dream in which Gabriel appears and, after the child's birth, it is disclosed to everyone through the midwife's testimony that Mary is still a virgin.

One other detail of significance is the association of the story of Herakles' strangling of the snakes, told by the midwife as a dream, with the words in Genesis 3: 15 about the son of a woman who will bruise the serpent's head.²¹

²⁰ All details of this play are taken from Lindberger (1956), who noted that copies of Burmeister's text were extremely rare and that he knew the play only through the summary and extensive quotations in K. v. Reinhardstoettner, *Plautus. Spätere Bearbeitungen plautinischer Lustspiele* (1886) 208-214 and in Otto Günther's *Plautuserneuerungen in der deutschen Literatur des XV. - XVII. Jahrhunderts* (1886) 58-63. The note and quotation are from p. 43.

²¹ All Bible references or quotations are from the King James version.

A French play written in 1636, Jean Rotrou's *Les Sosies*, has certain interesting features of relevance to later versions of the myth.²² His play follows Plautus in the main, though, instead of the dual pregnancies of ten and seven months, he makes Herakles' conception and his birth almost contemporaneous. Jupiter, in his final speech from on high, after confessing his part in the affair, tells Amphitryon that he has reduced the normal nine months of pregnancy to just three days.²³ Amphitryon accepts the outcome, though there are suggestions of somewhat less complacency than is evident in Plautus' character.

In Rotrou's play Jupiter comes close to revealing his identity on more than one occasion, both through verbal hints²⁴ and because his general appearance is more than a little suspicious. In one scene where they are together Alkmene comments on the lustre that surrounds him and notes that he does not seem to age. It does not appear that she guesses the truth, even when, towards the end, her pseudo-husband – in conjunction with an assertion that he is not without knowledge – ventures to predict that Jupiter himself will be believed to be her child's father.²⁵ However, it is

²² Rotrou, 79.

²³ Il reçoit l'être, l'âme, et naît presque à la fois;
Et, pouvant tout sur la nature,
J'en romps l'ordre en cette aventure,
Et fais faire à trois nuits l'office de neuf mois.
(144)

²⁴ See, for example, the lines beginning 'Pour moi, si, souverain des dieux et des mortels ...' (For myself, if, ruler of the gods and of mortals ...) on p. 116.

²⁵ Adieu, conserve-toi pour ce fruit précieux
Qui va naître à la terre à la honte des cieux,
Et dont j'osais prédire, et non sans connaissance,
Que Jupin sera cru l'auteur de sa naissance,
Et qu'un jour ses exploits les moins laborieux
Ne lui devront pas moins qu'un rang entre les dieux.
(136)

significant that the Captains are also present and apparently see nothing revealing in Jupiter's remarks.

A final point of significance in Rotrou's play is his introduction of the idea that Jupiter's divinity is not sufficient to prevent him from experiencing slight feelings of jealousy. At the end of the reconciliation scene, after Alcmene has remarked on the 'compliment' entailed in his protestations of love, he tells her it is evidence of a degree of jealousy in his feelings for her.²⁶

Certain of the features of Rotrou's play are to be seen also in the *Amphitryon* of Molière, the most significant of Plautus' successors up to the time it was written.²⁷ This very witty, very French version, which was first produced in January 1668, apparently with Molière himself in the part of Sosia, makes plain its origin in a very different era and a very different society from that obtaining when Plautus' play appeared. It makes the most of the comic aspects of the affair and has in fact been described by one translator as 'the most nearly perfect comedy in all literature'.²⁸ It has also been observed that Molière restored unity to what had been a 'double-barreled' plot, but did so 'at the expense of depriving Jupiter of such shreds of august dignity and divine concern for a harassed world that still clung to him in earlier plays

²⁶ Alcmène: Un pareil compliment ne vous est pas commun.
 Jupiter: Je ne l'achève pas, puisqu'il t'est importun:
 Il témoigne en effet un peu de jalousie ...
 (116)

²⁷ Molière 2, 347.

²⁸ Passage & Mantinband (1974) 130.

and of reducing him to the level of a light-hearted libertine'.²⁹

The play runs very much on Plautus' lines – the long night is included and Mercury enjoys himself at Sosia's expense – but there are changes caused by the introduction of additional characters and Pterelas' golden goblet is transformed into a brooch with five diamonds. More important changes are to be found in the expansion of Rotrou's hint of Jupiter's jealousy into an attempt by Jupiter to persuade Alkmene to declare her love for him in terms that apply to him personally. He tells her that he could wish no sense of duty entered into her feelings for him and that it was not merely to the prerogatives of a husband that he owed the love he had enjoyed from her. To Alkmene's objection that it is these prerogatives alone that have allowed her to give free rein to her feelings, he goes on to make a distinction between husband and lover in terms that indicate his identity to those in the know, but not so clearly as to suggest that Alkmene is made aware. He makes the same distinction in the reconciliation scene when he tells Alkmene it is the husband who bears the guilt for the behaviour of which she is complaining and asks her to spare the lover punishment. However, Alkmene refuses to make any fine distinctions and Jupiter has to kneel at her feet and threaten to kill himself to gain her forgiveness. In the final scene, when he discloses his identity, he admits to being jealous of Amphitryon, the man to whom alone Alkmene's love has been given.

Amphitryon makes no response to Jupiter's announcement.

²⁹ Shero (1956) 218.

Molière leaves it to Mercury to explain in the prologue that Amphytrion and Alkmene have been married for only a few days and omits the scenes announcing the birth of Herakles. This is merely prophesied by Jupiter at the end, with no reference to a twin birth. Molière thus avoids the problems of timing inherent in earlier versions.

Molière's play was followed by a number of operas, semi-operas and similar works, starting with John Dryden's *Amphytrion: or The Two Socias* in 1690. This play³⁰ follows its predecessors in essentials, including Molière's innovation of attempts by Jupiter to persuade Alkmene to make a distinction between husband and lover. However, it also introduces a number of additional characters – notably one Judge Gripus, a disreputable character through whom Dryden pokes fun at the law – and adds one scene that is of special interest in regard to the German plays that follow. In Dryden's play, by contrast with Molière's work, Alkmene is present at the end and undertakes the unenviable task of deciding which of the two claimants is the true Amphytrion. Her first choice is the correct one, but, when Amphytrion rejects her, she opts for Jupiter instead.

The next major version of the myth to appear was the *Amphytrion* of Heinrich von Kleist, published in 1807, but it was influenced in no small measure by another, largely forgotten, play that preceded it by a few years – Johann Daniel Falk's

³⁰ Dryden 6, 137.

Amphitruon.³¹ There is no evidence that Falk was acquainted with Dryden's work, but the fact that the later play includes a scene in which Alkmene makes clear her preference for Jupiter raises at least the possibility that he did. In important respects Falk diverges from his models. In probably the most significant of these, Jupiter abandons his plan to seduce Alkmene when he finds how firmly attached to her husband she is. In another variation, Falk's Jupiter indicates on his first appearance in the play that one of his reasons for this visit is his intention to punish Amphitryon for the jealousy that prompts his frequent suspicions as to his wife's fidelity, suspicions that have caused Alkmene much torment.

Kleist's play³² begins as a free translation of Molière's and in fact it is styled on the title page 'ein Lustspiel nach Molière', but it eventually develops into a completely different work. By contrast with its model Kleist's drama is actually a tragi-comedy, as the term is understood to-day, with strong emphasis on the tragic elements. It contains many similarities in wording to that of Falk's play and also calls to mind that work in the scene later referred to, where Alkmene is called on to say which of the two Amphitryons is her husband.³³

Kleist's Jupiter, on his first appearance with Alkmene, adopts the same

³¹ Falk, in Sembdner, 26. The play was published in 1804.

³² Kleist 1, 245.

³³ The resemblances are all pointed out by Sembdner in his notes to Falk's play (195-203). Sembdner makes out a good case for Kleist's having known Falk and having a considerable familiarity with his work. The case rests on the assumption that the two became acquainted through the relationship each enjoyed with Ludwig Wieland in 1803, the year before Falk's play was published and a time when, according to Sembdner but contrary to earlier opinion, Kleist began working on his own version.

approach as does Molière's character, of trying to persuade her to differentiate between the husband and the lover. Alkmene replies in much the same terms as Molière's Alkmene: but Jupiter persists, in words that plainly indicate his impersonation, though Alkmene, horrified, at the time takes what he says as jesting. She does, however, eventually agree to forgive the lover for the husband's misdeeds, in terms that leave no doubt they are one and the same for her.

As the play proceeds, Kleist diverges more and more from Molière in the scenes involving Jupiter and Alkmene. The prize that Amphitryon received for killing the enemy king (now termed Labdacus) has become a headband adorned with a diamond on which there is an initial engraved, and Alkmene (having been given it by Jupiter) is wearing this as a girdle when she meets Amphitryon on his return from war. The confusion arising from her possession of it is compounded when she discovers after Amphitryon's departure that the initial is not an 'A', as she had thought, but a 'J', and at the same time she recalls the slanderous words used by her lover of her husband in what at the time she took to be a jest. She confesses to her maid, Charis, that on that occasion she had found her husband more beautiful than ever before, so much so that she might have thought him a portrait of himself, 'ins Göttliche verzeichnet' (1191).

Consequently, when Jupiter comes back she is distraught and, thinking that this is the real Amphitryon, she wants to leave him for ever. At the end, he again clearly indicates his identity – for instance, when he refers to her as a creature so close to the divine concept 'Wie's meiner Hand Äonen nicht entschlüpfte!' (1573) – but Alkmene

is apparently too bewildered to notice. The play becomes tragedy when Amphytryon and Jupiter finally confront each other and Amphytryon confidently asks Alkmene to identify him as her husband. Instead she points to Jupiter and then aggravates the situation by addressing Amphytryon in scathing terms. Jupiter's clear indications of his identity and Alkmene's words relating to his appearance are strongly reminiscent of Rotrou and it seems that Kleist must have been acquainted with the work of the French author, despite the latter's being rather less well-known than Molière.³⁴

At the end of Kleist's play Jupiter acknowledges his deception and, after telling Amphytryon he can look forward to a glorious future, asks him to say whether there is anything further he would want. Amphytryon, admitting he is not satisfied with what has been prophesied for him, asks for a son like the Tyndarides (that is, Castor and Pollux, whose mother, Leda, the wife of Tyndareus, was also visited by Zeus) and is promised the mighty Herakles. As in Molière's play, there is no mention of a second child being born at the same time.

As already noted, in 1929 another French play appeared, the *Amphytryon* of

³⁴ Wittkowski ((1978) 134) notes that the scene in which Alkmene shows the monogram to Charis 'ist zum Teil bei Rotrou (III, 2) vorgebildet', without further comment. By contrast, Lindberger ((1956) 127) comments that there is no indication that Kleist was acquainted with Rotrou's play and that the source of these similar features must probably be sought in Kleist himself. However, this is not the only one of Kleist's plays that suggests his acquaintance with the French author. In his 'Rotrou's *Venceslas* und Kleists *Prinz von Homburg*' (*Modern Philology*, 37 (1939-40), 201-212) Hans M. Wolff pointed out such clear similarities, both in outline and in detail, between those two plays as to suggest a strong possibility that Kleist knew of the French author's work, a possibility that can only be strengthened by the present comparison.

Jean Giraudoux – originally titled *Amphitryon* 38.³⁵ Although the Greek setting is preserved, this is a very different play from its predecessors. In essence, it is a modern French comedy. The plot is somewhat complicated, but for this purpose can be summarised briefly. On Jupiter's first appearance as Amphitryon, Alkmene persuades him to agree that they should each take an oath reinforcing their marriage vows. Jupiter's oath is ambiguous, but Alkmene swears to be faithful to her husband or to die – 'd'être fidèle à Amphitryon, mon mari, ou de mourir' (120). Jupiter plans to return next night as himself, the projected visit is announced publicly and as well Alkmene is informed personally by Mercury. Alkmene is insistent that she will not receive Jupiter and when one of his earlier loves, Leda, appears the latter is persuaded to agree to take Alkmene's place. However, prior to Jupiter's arrival, Amphitryon temporarily returns to Thebes and, thinking he is Jupiter, Alkmene secretly sends Leda in to him. Before Jupiter appears in his own form, there is a further announcement that he is to come at sunset, the one-day war arranged by Jupiter to get Amphitryon out of the way comes to an end and Amphitryon returns. As husband and wife discuss what to do, Alkmene is led to suspect the truth. When she finally confronts Jupiter she is still prepared to die in terms of her oath but manages to talk the god into granting both her and Amphitryon the gift of amnesia. This he does with a kiss.

It is not clear whether Kaiser knew Giraudoux's play, but if he did it can have influenced him but little. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of it that are relevant to matters discussed in this study and it will be referred to accordingly.

³⁵ Giraudoux 1, 95.

These are the plays that, along with the myth, form the literary tradition that the title of Kaiser's play, and his statement about its origin, would suggest is the basis of his work. However, the resemblances either to myth or to earlier plays are demonstrably fewer than the differences. All that Kaiser has incorporated is the story of Zeus's descent to earth in the form of Amphitryon, his seduction of Alkmene while Amphitryon is at war, her virginity and the conception of Herakles. He has changed everything else. Apart from his elimination of the parts of Mercury and Sosia, he has transformed Amphitryon from a reasonable human being into a callous and selfish warmonger and would-be tyrant and in the process completely changed his reason for going to war; he has altered the character of Zeus, whom he portrays as a punitive god but no philanderer, and has given him a different reason for coming to earth; he has invented a new explanation for Alkmene's virginity, in Amphitryon's precipitate departure from their wedding feast; he has introduced the scene of the trial of Amphitryon for an offence of which he was not guilty, together with its sequel in Zeus's substitution of the penalty of exile for what Zeus regards as his crime, his warmongering; and he has converted Herakles from a super-hero into the promised saviour of mankind.

The number and nature of these changes suggest that there is another, even more important, source for Kaiser's play, and this has now to be discussed.

Chapter II – *The Source of Amphitryon's Warmongering*

In his *Amphitryon in Frankreich und Deutschland*, Jacobi has suggested that one of the stories in the *Gesta Romanorum* – the Latin collection of stories, fables and parables compiled somewhere about the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century – is actually a mediaeval Christianized version of the Amphitryon myth.¹ The story concerns an imaginary Roman Emperor Jovinianus, who one day asks himself whether there is any other god besides himself and next day finds that he has been displaced by his double. The double proves to be his guardian angel, who looks after his kingdom while he endures the punishment decreed by God for his sin of pride, and relinquishes the throne again once Jovinianus recognizes his error and repents.

Jacobi's suggestion is discounted by Lindberger, who notes in particular the difference between the erotic complications that form the basis of the Amphitryon motif and what is the central feature of the Jovinianus story – the punishment of pride.² However, he accepts that the tale of Jovinianus is a Christian version of a Jewish legend about King Solomon and Asmodeus and later in his work he claims that

Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon* is [...] a new variation of the old legend about the presumptuous prince who is punished by a divine double who assumes his position. Amphitryon is exiled to lead a life of humiliation, just as King Solomon and Emperor Jovinianus. It is not possible to determine only from the text, which version of this legend was Kaiser's source; the basic traits,

¹ Jacobi (1952) 18-20.

² Lindberger (1956) 36-39.

however, are clearly recognizable; Kaiser has combined them with certain motifs from Kleist's *Amphitryon* and with some material from Greek sources.³

Lindberger's justification for this statement is suspect. In his initial discussion, he refers to a monograph by Hermann Varnhagen, which details the history and later development of this particular legend, but he does not examine it or the connection between the stories it deals with and Kaiser's play in any detail.⁴ He seems content to accept the Jovinianus or the King Solomon version as Kaiser's source. This does not appear a satisfactory conclusion, in view of the considerable difference between the sin of pride and Amphitryon's tyrannical ambition and insensitivity to the suffering of others. However, a reading of the complete monograph, a brief summary of which follows,⁵ suggests that there is in fact a very close link between the tradition and *Zweimal Amphitryon*.

Varnhagen's subject is a long line of plays, prose works and poems which appear to have their origins in an old Indian belief in the ability of a person, through the use of magic, to enter into the body of a recently deceased person or animal and to go on living thereafter in that form. He traces the development of this theme through the early fairy tales to which the belief gave rise up to its presentation, in the transmuted form in which it subsequently appeared, in Longfellow's *Tales of a*

³ Lindberger (1956) 212-213.

⁴ Lindberger (1956) 38.

⁵ Varnhagen (1882). The various references to Varnhagen's comprehensive survey of this literary history will be identified by page numbers in the text.

Wayside Inn in 1863 and a play by an unknown Danish author – *Den forvandlede Konge* (The Transformed King) – in 1876.⁶

One of the early stories in this tradition was associated with the powerful Indian Emperor, Vikramaditya or Candragupta II, who reigned in northern India from c.380 to c.415 A.D. In this version (1-2) the Emperor in his old age was persuaded by a magician to seek a renewal of his youth by transferring his soul from his own ailing body into the body of a young man newly dead, but quickly learnt his mistake when his own empty body was invaded by the magician, who then killed him and ascended his throne.

These early stories varied considerably in detail but were alike in their basic theme – the use of magic to transfer from a live body to a dead one. In time this theme took a slightly different form, the essential feature from then on being the taking over of a live body rather than a dead one. This is the form that appears in the Jewish legend about King Solomon, of which there are several versions (14; 16-20). Typical of these is the story of how Solomon was replaced on his throne by an impersonator for several years as a punishment for his rejection of God's word. Interestingly, the impersonator who was God's agent in this case was Asmodeus, the King of the Demons, who, as seen in the preceding chapter, figures in Burmeister's *Sacri Mater Virgo*. Two Mohammedan versions of the Solomon legend also exist (22-23).

⁶ Lindberger ((1956) 39) suggests that Hans Andersen's *Den Onde Fyrste* (The Wicked Prince) is also part of this tradition. However, that story lacks two important elements that characterize these writings from early on – the divine-inspired impersonation and the exile-induced repentance.

Once the basic story reaches the West, it appears in numerous guises from the 13th century on. The original Western version has not been preserved, but Varnhagen reconstructs it in the following terms, which merit quoting in full to bring out the salient points of this particular tradition.

Es lebte einst ein gewaltiger und stolzer König, welcher glaubte, daß seine Macht der Gottes gleich käme. Als er sich eines Tages auf der Jagd erhitzt hatte und ein Wasser erblickte, entfernte er sich von seinem Gefolge, entkleidete sich und stieg hinein. Während er noch darin verweilte, erschien ein Engel, verwandelte des Königs Aussehen und Gestalt, nahm selbst diese an, legte seine Kleider an, bestieg sein Pferd, begab sich zu dem Gefolge und ritt mit diesem, das ihn für den König hielt, in den königlichen Palast. Als nun der König aus dem Bade stieg, seine Kleider nicht fand und vergeblich nach seinem Gefolge rief, ward er zornig. Nackt wie er war, machte er sich auf den Weg zu der in der Nähe liegenden Wohnung eines seiner Krieger, um bei diesem Schutz und Hülfe zu finden. Als er aber hier der König zu sein erklärte, wurde er verlacht, geschlagen und fortgejagt. Nicht besser erging es ihm, als er im Hause eines seiner Räte Schutz suchte. Er ging nun in sein Schloß, wo er vor den Engel, der an seiner Statt regierte, gebracht, jedoch auch hier mit seinen Ansprüchen höhnisch abgewiesen wurde. Auch die Königin, sein Weib, erklärte, ihn nie gesehen zu haben. Da ging der König fort und erkannte in seinem Schicksale eine gerechte Strafe für seine Überhebung. Nachdem er sich gedemütigt, erhielt er endlich, mit Rücksicht darauf, daß er doch immer ein gerechter Richter gewesen war, von dem Engel Gestalt und Reich wieder und regierte fortan als ein frommer König.

(23-24)⁷

Two particular points in this account are worth noting. The first is the specific reference to the wife's failure to recognize the imposture, as in the *Amphitryon* plays an important element in the plot. The second is the indication of the ruler's exalted opinion of himself, which is translated in both Kleist's and Kaiser's plays into Alkmene's idolization of her husband, *Amphitryon*.

⁷ Varnhagen (24) describes this as the product of a fusion of elements in the Solomon legend with some from the Indian fairy tales, in particular the version of the latter appearing in the *Pantschatantra*, a collection of fables, fairy tales and stories put together between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D.

From this basic text Varnhagen notes two lines of development emerging, with a third later appearing as a combination of the other two.

The first of the three is known through the story already mentioned – the story in the *Gesta Romanorum* relating to the Emperor Jovinianus (25-28). Descendants of this story appear in various European languages, amongst them a poem and a play by the German Meistersinger Hans Sachs, who calls the ruler Jovianus in the poem but changes the name to Julianus in the play (28-38).

In the writings (44-90) that form part of the second line of development, of which the original text is also missing, there are various differences of detail (for example, the change of scene in some cases from a bathing place to a church) but one striking common element is the introduction of a New Testament reference, through the elevation to a central place in the story of a verse from the Magnificat – ‘deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles’ (Luke 1:52 – rendered in the King James Version as ‘He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree’). The sin of which the ruler is guilty in these stories is usually his refusal to allow that particular verse to be sung, for which as a punishment God sends an angel to take his place until he repents. It is to this group that Longfellow’s verse and the Danish play *Den forvandlede Konge* belong (66-90).

Varnhagen traces his third series, that he classes as a mixture of the first two,

from the work of one Reimundus at some time before the end of the 17th century⁸ to its culmination in a long poem by August Friedrich Ernst Langbein, which was entitled *Das Märchen von König Luthbert* and was included in an edition of the author's collected works in 1835 (96-104). The significance of this poem lies in the nature of the principal sin of which the King is guilty, namely, his warmongering and his tyrannical oppression of his people (102). The poem begins with an account of the circumstances of the king's dethronement, including his being left with old clothes appropriate to a beggar and being scornfully refused entry to his own palace when he approaches it making his claim to be the king. An audience with his impersonator avails him nothing and, ridiculed by the people, he is led away to begin his punishment, wandering from house to house begging for a crust of bread.

Up to this point the story follows the pattern of its forerunners, but it takes a different turn when Luthbert visits an old hermit, who tells him what has happened, and why. Luthbert's real sin is not, as in earlier versions of this story, the sin of overweening pride and disrespect for God, though this is there, too, but the wickedness to which his arrogance gives rise – his lust for power, his oppression of his people and his bloodthirstiness.

Kehrt denn zuvörderst einen Blick
 Auf Eure Lebensbahn zurück!
 Schaut, wie alldort, als Höllenfrucht
 Von Eurer wilden Eroberungssucht,
 Ein grauses Meer von Blut entsprang
 Und Eures Landes Wohl verschlang.
 Nie rastend führten Eure Fahnen

⁸ Varnhagen sees Reimundus' work as a combination of the *Gesta Romanorum* story and a short piece included by St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence at the time of his death in 1459, in one of his theological works (90).

Die blühenden Söhne der Unterthanen,
 Der alten Väter Trost und Stab,
 Hinab ins unersättliche Grab,
 Und Eures Volkes Überrest,
 Von grimmer Tyrannei gepreßt
 Und ausgesogen bis aufs Blut,
 Verlor des Lebens heitern Mut;
 [...]
 Ihr dünkter Euch selbst der höchste Gott,
 Triebt über alles Heilige Spott ...
 (102)

The actual date of composition of this poem is not known, but it must have been written quite some time before its inclusion in the edition of Langbein's collected works published after his death, which occurred in January 1835; and one cannot seriously doubt Varnhagen's conclusion that it was written with Napoleon in mind.⁹ In support of his claim he notes how the last lines of the poem differ from the usual conclusion of the story (97):

Doch wie er förder sich benahm,
 Ob er gebessert wiederkam,
 Darüber gab die alte Legende
 Uns keine Nachricht in die Hände.

The fact that the poet questions the ruler's permanent reform seems to point to the poem's composition between the time of Napoleon's return from Elba and his final abdication a few months later. If it was written later, the author's reason for expressing doubt rather than certainty may have been simply a desire to keep as far as possible within this particular tradition.

⁹ Varnhagen has an ingenious explanation for the use of the name 'Luthbert' for a French Emperor, suggesting a resemblance to the noun 'Leopard', which can be formed out of the second half of the two names 'Napoleon' and 'Bonaparte' (97).

It is readily apparent that there is a considerable correspondence between the elements that appear in *Zweimal Amphitryon* and those that are found in all the works in this tradition that relate to a live body rather than a dead one. These include an avenging god rather than one with amorous intent, a sinful ruler, God's decision to punish him, his impersonation by a double (which deceives his wife no less than everyone else), his exile and his ill-treatment in the course of it, and his final recognition of his sin followed by his repentance and restoration to society. However, it is with Langbein's poem that the most important link emerges.

Two minor points of comparison should be mentioned first. At the end of his visit to the hermit, the king is told that his impersonator was sent by God and will continue to rule the kingdom until Luthbert has atoned for his sins and earned pardon through repentance and, further, that if he has already been forgiven (as proves to be the case) he will find waiting at the door his piebald horse, already saddled and bridled and bearing on its back a knapsack containing his own clothes. This little piece of divine magic is reflected in Act II of *Zweimal Amphitryon*, when Amphitryon's decision to clothe himself as a goatherd for his reconnaissance expedition is followed by the unexpected and unexplained appearance in the tent of the necessary attire, complete with herdsman's staff, a filled water flask and a pouch full of bread (464-465).

There is also Langbein's reference to the quality of the grapes made into wine, in the part where the king has just been thrown out of the city.

Schon plagte brennender Durst ihn sehr,
Und seine Taschen waren leer.

Sonst war ihm der beste Wein zu schlecht,
 Und oft erklärt' er's für ungerecht,
 Daß die Natur nicht zu seinem Genieß
 Noch edlere Trauben wachsen ließ.

(100)

There seems to be an echo of these lines in *Amphitryon*'s complaint before Pharsala, when he refers to the grapes giving forth wine that tasted bitter because too long ripening.

War nicht
 die Zeit wie ausgelöscht gewesen – stockend,
 die ihren Wandel treibt mit Keim und Frucht
 und aus der Traube schüttet reichen Wein,
 der bitter uns geschmeckt?

[...]

Pharsala! – So soll schlechter Wein nun heißen,
 der allzu träge reifte.

(451)

However, the striking point of resemblance between poem and play, which is at the same time the point at which both diverge from other writings in this tradition, is the sin of which each of the chief characters is found guilty – his lust for conquest, with its consequence in oppression of the people. Although Kaiser's knowledge of the poem is not proven, this correspondence speaks for itself and surely identifies Langbein's work, with the weight of the tradition of which it forms part behind it, as perhaps the key element in the ultimate form of *Zweimal Amphitryon*. The fact that in Varnhagen's account Langbein's forenames are not mentioned suggests that, if more or less forgotten today, he was well enough known at the end of the last century (when the account was published) and would then have been familiar to readers in the

early part of this century as well.¹⁰ There is, however, no reason to discount the possibility that Kaiser had read the whole of Varnhagen's account, in which Langbein's poem is reproduced in full, and which could have been fairly readily available during Kaiser's early years.

¹⁰ He was known until 1907 at least. One of his ballads, *Die Wachtel und ihre Kinder*, appears in an 1881 school anthology - *Lesebuch für Bürgerschulen* (Leipzig, 30th ed.) and again in a different one in the early part of this century - Wolffs *Poetischer Hausschatz des Deutschen Volkes* (Leipzig, 30th ed. [1907]).

Chapter III – *Amphitryon's Likeness to Hitler*

Langbein's poem provides what may fairly be claimed as the inspiration for the change that Kaiser has made in the character of Amphitryon – probably the most fundamental of the changes that he has made to the myth. Just how different his Amphitryon is from his predecessors is readily seen. The Amphitryons of Plautus, Rotrou, Molière and Dryden are all, in greater or less degree, acceptable characters. Being human, they have faults – faults such as vanity, touchiness about honour, impatience, irascibility and a tendency to see the use of force as a solution to problems – but, in the context, these are not serious flaws. Giraudoux's character, who definitely plays second fiddle to his wife, is a tender loving husband and, though a General, quite unwarlike. Falk adds a slightly different touch to the character by the previously noted reference to the torment that Alkmene has suffered in the past through Amphitryon's frequent suspicions as to her fidelity.

Two particular aspects of Kleist's *Amphitryon* should be mentioned – the tender way in which he speaks to Alkmene when she is being urged to identify her husband in the last scene (2215-2220) and the complete confidence in her integrity that he displays after she has not merely disavowed him but followed this up by virulent abuse of him as an impostor. Then he tells the assembled company: 'O ihrer Worte jedes ist wahrhaftig,/ Zehnfach geläutert Gold ist nicht so wahr' (2281-2282); and concludes this speech by expressing his unshakeable conviction that Jupiter 'Amphitryon ihr ist' (2290). The good impression thus created is somewhat negated by his subsequent behaviour, in that it is in response to his specific request that

Jupiter makes the promise of the birth of Herakles. It can be seen from an earlier statement¹ that the plan for this was already formed in Jupiter's mind, but, nevertheless, Amphytryon's request appears as a determination that, regardless of Alkmene's feelings in the matter, he is going to obtain compensation for his own hurt.

Kaiser's Amphytryon is anything but an estimable character. He is arrogant, callous, tyrannical, contemptuous of virtue and, above all, a supreme militarist, so that he closely resembles the ruler in Langbein's poem. However, Kaiser has fleshed out what is there only a sketchy portrait, contained in some 22 lines of the hermit's accusation of Luthbert, into a very detailed picture of a power-hungry leader; and for these details it would seem likely that he has taken as his model the would-be world conqueror whose lust for power and indifference to the sufferings of people standing in his way had in the few years prior to the play's being written plunged so much of Europe into misery and been responsible for the death of millions. To what extent, then, is a specific resemblance to Adolf Hitler evident in the play?

In fact, the image of Hitler is conjured up in many different ways, but two significant pointers might be mentioned first – the use of the term 'der Führer' in the First Elder's speech of condemnation of Amphytryon at the end of the latter's trial

¹ Jupiter:

Wenn du Kallisto nicht, die herrliche,
Europa auch und Leda nicht beneidest,
Wohlan, ich sags, ich neide Tyndarus,
Und wünsche Söhne mir, wie Tyndariden.

(1352-1355)

(509)² and also his references to tyranny, prompted by Zeus/Amphitryon's reported jubilant words on his departure from Thebes after his night with Alkmene: 'Jetzt werd' - - ich Herr in Theben!' (509, 508). Although these words are spoken by Zeus, we must assume he spoke in the knowledge of Amphitryon's actual ambitions.

Amphitryon's attitude to war resembles Hitler's in its objective of furthering his own interests. It is made obvious before he himself appears, through the revelations of Alkmene, whose love for him borders on idolatry, and through the report of the messenger whom she has sent to him in his camp before Pharsala. Although she and Amphitryon are only just married, the report the messenger brings back is that Amphitryon has refused to see him, since his only interest is in a message announcing the fall of Pharsala. Even her brother could not persuade him and advised the messenger to return, telling him the General was enraged at the city's resistance and in his fury was capable of attacking even his own brother (437).

Despondent, Alkmene confesses to her nurse that her marriage has not been consummated. She tells her of the moment at the marriage feast when the gifts were brought in for display, of the magnificent suit of armour that was the Captains' gift to Amphitryon and of the extraordinary effect it had on him.

Wie kann ich sie beschreiben? Nur sein Blick,
in dem sich spiegelte, war (sic) vor ihm gleißte,
macht mich beredt. Es dehnte sich sein Auge,
als wollte er des Lides Vorhang sprengen,
zu überweisem Rund. Ich wußte nicht

² 'Der Feldherr' is used elsewhere - pp. 484 & 485, for instance.

vorher, daß Blitze sich entzünden können
in eines Menschauges Spähen.
(441)

The last words are similar to those used by Medea in Grillparzer's play *Die Argonauten*, when she describes Jason as having 'einen Blitz in der Hand/ Und zwei andre im flammenden Blick'.³ More particularly, the word 'Blitz', with its association with Zeus, hints at the tyrannical ambitions that Amphytryon will be seen to share with Hitler.

Later Alkmene mentions specifically the shield that forms part of the armour given to Amphytryon, which she says:

bewahrte seine Kämpfe in
immer engeren Kreisen bis zur Mitte
der grausigen Meduse, die den Feind
schreckt.
(441)

Kaiser has borrowed the armour motif from accounts relating to famous commanders in classical literature. In the *Iliad* Achilles has a magnificent suit of armour made for him by Hephaestus, in particular a rich and beautiful shield that is described in great detail, and Agamemnon also has a splendid shield, this one having the face of the Medusa at the centre.⁴ The motif occurs also in the *Aeneid* of Virgil and in the pseudo-Hesiodic poem, *The Shield of Herakles*.⁵ Amphytryon was so enraptured with the gift that he insisted on putting it on and Alkmene's detailed description of this

³ Franz Grillparzer, *Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Peter Frank & Karl Pömbacher (München, 1960, rev. ed. 1969. 1, 817) 562-563.

⁴ Homer (1951) 18, 474-612; 11, 32-37.

⁵ Virgil, *Aeneid*. VIII, 617-731 & VII, 785-792; Hesiod (1973) 198-210 (lines 122-320).

process (441-442) also owes much to the *Iliad* and both Agamemnon's and Achilles' donning of their armour.⁶

In the course of her description Alkmene compares the plume of the helmet with the beam of light shed by the sun as it rises behind a hill (442),⁷ and the image of the sun is taken up again later in the contrasting situation of the blaze that is consuming Pharsala. There the Second Captain says: 'Ein Sonnenuntergang lodert nicht so,/ der einen Tag vernichtet!' (452), effectively portraying the disastrous fate of Pharsala while at the same time emphasizing the glory seen as surrounding Amphitryon. Alkmene's description continues:

So stand er und er schien sich selbst
zu sehn in seinem Prunk der Rüstung -
[...]
Sein Lachen erst und dann die schallend Worte:
es soll nicht diese Rüstung ungeweiht sein,
wie sie noch nie für Streit im Feld geschaffen,
ich will sie würdig weihn - ich weiß das Opfer,
das ihr gespendet werden soll: Pharsala!
[...]
Es wehte sie ein Sturmwind aus dem Saal
- so eilig war der Aufbruch ...
(442)

The marked incongruity between the metaphor of consecration – 'ungeweiht', 'weißen' and 'Opfer' – and the deadly means by which Amphitryon will achieve his object is very effective.

⁶ Homer (1951) 11, 15-44 & 19, 367-386. The description in *The Shield of Herakles* opens in the same way.

⁷ Cf. also, in relation to the preceding words 'und wuchs zu neuem Maß', the words used of Penthesilea as she races alongside Achilles in Kleist's play *Penthesilea*: 'Ihr Schatten,/ Groß, wie ein Riese, in der Morgensonne' - Kleist 1, 321 (419-420).

Kaiser adheres to the pre-literary mythology in making Alkmene still a virgin at the time of Zeus's visit. However, he departs from the myth, in fact reverses it, in providing the motive for Amphytryon's attack on Pharsala.⁸ In the myth Amphytryon went to war in order to win Alkmene by avenging the death of her brothers, and he had to agree to the condition that the marriage remain unconsummated until this was achieved. Here it is Amphytryon who is responsible for the fact that Alkmene is still a virgin, as he forsakes her on their wedding night in order to embark on an unprovoked war. However a hint of the myth remains, in that at the end Amphytryon has to work his passage back to her, through his period of exile.⁹

More particularly, however, the unprovoked attack on Pharsala is evidence of Amphytryon's kinship with Hitler. Act II opens in the camp before Pharsala, now ablaze. For Amphytryon this is 'verdientes Los', because the city held out so long, and he gazes with satisfaction on the sight of its swift reduction to ashes – 'Ich will Pharsala brennen sehen!' (451). Just as Hitler laid the blame for the invasion and defeat of Poland in 1939 on the refusal of the Poles to agree to his proposals, which he described as 'maßvoll', for settling the differences between them,¹⁰ so

⁸ Szondi (1973) 181; Lindberger (1956) 204. Wittkowski's statement ((1978) 49) is to the contrary – 'Ähnlich wie bei Hesiod führt Amphytryon Krieg um des Krieges willen und vernachlässigt darüber seine Frau'.

⁹ Cf. here Zeus's words, referring to himself, during his first meeting with Alkmene:
 Doch er beschloß Amphytryon zu wandeln
 und einen Weg zu leiten, der ihn zu
 Alkmene lenkt.

(449)

¹⁰ Speech of 19/9/1939 – Domarus (1965) II, 1, 1357f.

Amphitryon accepts no responsibility for the destruction of Pharsala. It could have been avoided had the inhabitants accepted the terms he earlier offered – terms that he mentions as if they were eminently reasonable.

Was war gefordert? Schickt mir eure Männer
zum Dienst im Fron des niedern Lagerdiensts:
Zeltpflocke rammen, Sudelwäsche waschen,
die Unratgruben räumen für Entgelt
des ungelitt'nen Peitschenhiebs, wenn die
Verrichtung tadellos erfüllt.

Plaintively he asks:

Gehorchten sie
wie es die Schwächeren dem Überleg'nen
an Zahl und Waffen schulden? Liefen sie
heraus und stürzten sich vor mir in Staub?
(452)

In the terms offered there is a reminder of Hitler's policy of employing not only workers conscripted abroad but also prisoners of war as slave labour in Germany.¹¹ The last words, recalling those of Jupiter in Kleist's play (1905), are also an indication of Amphitryon's exalted opinion of himself.

The heroic defence that was the response of the inhabitants, and that Amphitryon describes so vividly, excites no admiration – its sequel is the 'gerechte Strafe' now being meted out.

Sie schlossen dichter nur die Tore - höhnend
knirschten die Riegel hinterm harten Bollwerk -
und von der Mauer glotzten freche Wächter.
Sie wachten dreist - zu dreist - sie wachten noch
als Tote, die, von sich'rem Bogenschuß

¹¹ See Heydecker & Leeb (1962) 324-327 & Maser (1979) 210-211 for evidence given before the Nuremberg Tribunal as to the programme, which involved more than five million people.

erlegt, als Schanze neuem Frechling dienten,
der für sie eintrat.

(452)

This scene also reveals Amphitryon's extreme callousness, as, in what must surely be a reference to Hitler's responsibility for the murder of so many millions in the Holocaust,¹² he revels in the smell of burning human flesh.

Laßt diesen Dunst mich noch einsaugen.
Mir strömt er süßer als der Mandel Hauch
und alles Harzes dargebrachte Weihe,
die Zeus so gern verzehrt in blauem Räuchern.
Hier mischt sich in den ätzend scharfen Qualm
den (sic) glostenden Gebälks ein andrer Ruch,
der meinen Nüstern schmeichelt unvergleichlich:
brennendes Menschenfleisch. - - -
Wer je von diesem Rauch genossen, dem
bleibt kein Entsagen. Voll're Trunkenheit
gewährt kein Becher dir - zum Rand gefüllt
und ausgeleert und wieder voll und leer
in längster Folge.

(453)

This extravagant, eulogistic language is totally barbaric, and may well have been in part inspired by the stories of a much earlier dictator's enjoyment of the destructive power of fire. When the Great Fire of Rome broke out in A.D. 64, the Emperor Nero himself was suspected of having caused it and it was said that he:

watched the conflagration from the Tower of Maecenas, enraptured by what he called 'the beauty of the flames'; then put on his tragedian's costume and sang *The Sack of Ilium* from beginning to end.¹³

¹² Kaiser's knowledge of this can be assumed from a passage in a letter he wrote to Julius Marx (who was a Jew) shortly after *Zweimal Amphitryon* was finished, a passage that the reference to Churchill makes clear was heavily ironic. He said: 'Grundsätzlich haben Sie recht: man soll strategisch urteilen - nüchtern, kalt. Was tut es, ob eine Million Juden mehr massakriert werden. Wir und Churchill sind ja weit vom Schuss. [...] Ausserdem was geht's mich an? Ich bin Arier.' Letter 1287 [8/4/44].

¹³ Suetonius (Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus). *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by Robert Graves, rev. with intro. by Michael Grant. Penguin, 1979. 236.

Although the stories are now generally regarded as unfounded rumours, they remain part of legend in relation to Nero.

It now emerges that the city was in the end only taken by a trick. On the last morning when the inhabitants awoke, there was not a soldier to be seen. Instead,

...auf leerer Halde
weideten Ziegen - eine Herde Ziegen,
die prallen Euter schaukelnd ungemolken
vom Vortag. - - - .

(454)

To people on the verge of starvation, this was almost unbelievable good fortune and they rushed out of the gates in order to bring the goats in for milking, only to find the Thebans hard on the tails of the animals, whose horns added to the carnage.

The source of this incident is clearly the story of the fall of Troy – also achieved by a trick, when the Greeks, after long years of fighting, pretended to sail away from the area, leaving a massive wooden horse standing on the shore.¹⁴ Also to be found there is the contribution made by the inhabitants to their own destruction, through their too ready acceptance of appearances and their unwise decision to take the horse, with its human cargo, into the city. In that case, too, the city was reduced to ashes, with very great (though not total) loss of life.

Amphitryon clearly enjoys the power to destroy and wants more. He shows how much it means to him in a speech he makes to the Captains after his denunciation of the folly of the people of Pharsala in refusing to give in.

¹⁴ Virgil, *Aeneid*. II, 13ff.

Soll der Mensch nicht
 in seinem letzten Stolz das Wirken der
 Natur zerstörend übertreffen? Ich -
 ich fühle diesen Stolz in meiner Brust
 und lass' ihn herrschen über mich - und unbeherrscht
 mich dieser Herrschaft leihend breite
 ich sie zügellos zum Zwang des andern aus.
 Kann ich Amphitryon euch besser malen?
 Laßt mich in solchem Bild lebendig sein -
 und ausgelöscht, wenn ich mich jemals wandle.
 (453)

Hitler, too, as events were to show, preferred death to loss of his power. For Amphitryon, however, the last words are prophetic in an unexpected sense. He is not prepared to change and regards it as unthinkable that he might do so. Yet Zeus indicates at the end (513) that he will be reformed by his punishment, a punishment that, including as it does his demotion from his high military office, can be seen as a figurative extinction.

The picture of unbridled ambition to be seen in the speech from the use of the words 'unbeherrscht' and 'zügellos' – clear pointers to Hitler, whose whole career was marked by a lack of restraint – is completed by Zeus in the exultant words (already quoted) that he puts into Amphitryon's mouth when he leaves Thebes after his night with Alkmene (508).

That a propensity for blaming everybody but himself for the course of affairs was characteristic of Hitler is clearly shown by an analysis of his pronouncements during the period 1939-1942.¹⁵ It is therefore not surprising to find Amphitryon

¹⁵ Domarus (1965) II, 2, 2263ff.

displaying the same tendency on another occasion as well, namely, when he blames the Captains and their gift of armour for his treatment of Alkmene on their wedding night. He is impervious to the reluctance of the Captains to agree to his proposal to seek further conquests, until reminded of his refusal to receive the messenger from Alkmene. He then confesses to the interrupted marriage feast and reproaches himself for leaving Alkmene on this, 'der Nächte Nacht, um die selbst Götter uns/ beneiden'. In view of Alkmene's present involvement with Zeus, there is irony in his next statement: 'Ja - des höchsten Gottes Zeus/ war würdig sie - Alkmene'. The responsibility for his desertion of her, however, he attributes to the Captains.

Wie fiel es euch ein mich so zu verwirren
mit dem Geschenk der Rüstung, daß mein Blick
erlosch für alles um mich?

[...]

Entschädigt mich für ungenoss'nen Kelch
ein Ziegensieg? Soll ich zufrieden sein
mit diesem kargen Abschlag eurer Schuld,
die erst tilgt mit hundert neuen Siegen?

(459)

Admittedly, the Captains have fuelled Amphitryon's militarism through their gift;¹⁶ and, through their inability or reluctance to restrain him both at this point and later (when the excuses they make for not undertaking his proposed reconnaissance appear as feeble attempts to hold him back (462)), they are not without fault in this whole episode. Zeus recognizes this later – first, with his transposition of roles in his account of this scene and, at the end, with his use of the plural pronoun 'ihr' in his final denunciatory speech. In both cases he makes it plain that it was not merely

¹⁶ Szondi, after noting that the armour is the opposite of the gift that in the earlier plays Amphitryon brings home from the battlefield, makes a telling comment: 'Denn die Rüstung ist nicht das Beutestück des Feldherrn, sondern etwas, dessen Beute der Feldherr selber wird. [...] Der sie [the Captains] verführt, ist ihre eigene Kreatur.' Szondi (1973) 182.

Amphitryon's warlike proclivities that almost led to the extinction of mankind. However, the responsibility for Amphitryon's abandonment of Alkmene must rest on his shoulders alone.¹⁷ The greater importance to him of fighting rather than of his marriage to Alkmene may be compared with the situation of Hitler, who, for the sake of his war, was not prepared to marry his mistress until just before his death, when all was lost.

In this scene Amphitryon exhibits another trait reported of Hitler, in the latter's apparent ability to convincingly simulate an attack of frenzy and to return quite suddenly to a state of normality whenever it suited him.¹⁸ Having put the blame for his desertion of Alkmene on the Captains, Amphitryon indulges in a fit of rage, throwing his sword on the floor and starting to divest himself of his armour, before making a threat to mutilate himself.

Noch wilder reiß'
ich mit den Nägeln mir die nackte Brust auf,
um elend zu verenden wie ihr's wollt!
(459)

Immediately he is told 'Wir wollen nicht nach Theben!' (460), his composure returns, as shown by the stage direction '*sogleich freudig*'; and the suddenness with which this happens, and his calmness as he invites the officers to the table to look at his map, make it plain the rage was contrived – a striking incident that can only have

¹⁷ Buffinga considers there is some justification for Amphitryon's accusation - Buffinga (1986) 483.

¹⁸ Domarus (1965) I, 1, 8. '... da Hitler die Gewohnheit und Fähigkeit hatte, sich bei besonderen Anlässen wie ein Verrückter zu gebärden [...] Waren [seine Besucher] dann gegangen, konnte er, dem eben noch vor Erregung der Schaum vor dem Mund gestanden hatte, völlig ruhig und normal wirken. Bisweilen lachte er sogar über die gelungene Szene, die er gerade zum Besten gegeben hatte'. See also Szondi's comment that Amphitryon's behaviour here 'hält jene hysterische Querulanz fest, deren Verführungskraft es beinahe gelang, einem ganzen Volk, mit dessen Zustimmung, den Untergang zu bereiten'. (1973) 182.

been inspired by reports of Hitler's behaviour.

Amphitryon's militarism is clearly shown after the captains have expressed their wish to return to Thebes following the destruction of Pharsala, when he eulogizes the life of an officer and shows his complete disregard for the concerns of the ordinary soldier and the disruption to the latter's life caused by army service (456-457). 'Hauptleute seid ihr von Beruf. Es kann/ sich keiner ihm vergleichen', he says to them. He refers to the calling up of the ordinary people – the potters, the weavers, the carpenters and even the intellectuals – who must all abandon their own work to become part of the mighty army that feeds the officers' self-importance – 'Die mächtige Versammlung aller Männer/ für einen Feldzug, den ihr ganz befehlt' (456). For, as he says, '... jeder Tag, an dem nicht Waffen klirren,/ ist für Hauptleute ungelebte Zeit' (457).

Hitler's scorn for intellectuals¹⁹ and Kaiser's own suffering through the former's conduct are surely suggested in the two versions of this scene. According to the account given to the Elders by Zeus in the role of Amphitryon, and described by them in Act IV, what took place was the exact opposite of what actually happened – in Zeus's version, it was he who reminded the Captains of the ill-effects of such service on the men called up, mentioning specifically, in the words of the Third Elder:

Jene Schreiber,
die uns mit reifen Früchten ihres Geistes
beschenken wie die Erde spendet uns

¹⁹ Domarus (1965) I, 1, 22.

die andre Nahrung - unentbehrlich beide -

...
(485)

Here is Kaiser's own view of the importance of his work, in opposition to Amphitryon's effective disparagement of all but the fighting man.

The appearance in the tent of a goatherd's attire and equipment, after Amphitryon has decided to adopt that disguise for his reconnaissance in the mountains, is a matter of wonder to the Captains (464), but Amphitryon takes it more or less as his due. 'Doch/ soll sich Amphitryon nicht eines Wunders rühmen?', he asks and then adds:

Gleich ich nicht wunderbar so einem andern,
der auch als Ziegenhirt erscheint?
(465)

When asked what he means by that he says he is only claiming he will be indistinguishable from a genuine goatherd. This unsatisfactory explanation leaves the reference obscure.

When he later returns from his expedition, it is to find the three Elders in discussion with the Captains, and his astonishment prompts him to ask whether they had been forewarned of his coming.

War es Flug von Kranichen,
der euch bedeutsam schien? Oder nur Frösche,
die wilder sangen als es sonst gehört? -
(490)

The mention of cranes is an obvious classical reference. It refers to the legend of the flock of cranes whose appearance in Corinth led to the revelation of the murder of the poet Ibycus on his journey there and the identification of his murderers – a story

retold by Schiller in his ballad *Die Kraniche des Ibykus*. The reference to frogs probably derives from the chorus of frogs that accompanies Dionysus (inadequately disguised as Herakles) on his journey to the underworld in the play *The Frogs* by the Greek playwright, Aristophanes.

Amphitryon's account of his journey (493-494) shows him to be fearless, but the other qualities he displays are considerably less attractive. It is his callousness that appears again here – a callousness mingled with contempt for people of honour and a marked capacity for deceit. 'Welch/ ein Unheil!', he says of the offer made to him of a gift of goats to replace the ones allegedly lost, and goes on:

Die alten Ziegen
wollte ich wieder haben - greint' ich und
mich mit der Maske blöden Sinns entstellend
gewann ich tieferes Vertraun.
(492)

The generosity and lack of suspicion of the people are to him merely stupid and laughable.

Sind nicht
Blödsinnige sich selbst zum Schaden und
nicht anderen? So sind sie im Genuß
des Mitleids ...
(492)

Again, in talking of the way he has marked the route of his journey on the leather bag attached to his belt, he says:

Und sie plagten sich den Sinn
der wirren Linien zu erkennen. Ich -
unbändig lachte ich bei diesem Spiel:
wie sie nicht Tod und Brand entdecken konnten,
so nah' hier vor den eignen blöden Augen!
(493)

He has no compunction about proceeding with his plan to attack these trusting, defenceless people – he sees them in no other light than as an easy prey.

Das Volk ist unser rasches Opfer. Waffen -
sie kennen nur den urgewachs'nen Knüttel,

[...]

Die Knüttel brechen unsre Panzer nicht,
doch kann der Mut in der Verzweiflung selbst
beim Schwachen sich zu großer Macht entfalten.
Diese Gefahr bann' ich, indem im Überfall -
so unerwartet wie Gewitter losbricht
am blausten Tag - ich unsre Scharen lenke!

(492,493)

The emphasis in this speech on sudden and swift action is a clear reminder of Hitler, who has given the term 'blitzkrieg' to the English language. So, too, is the word 'Panzer' through its acquired meaning of a military tank, though here it means only armour.

As will be seen in the chapter dealing with the trial, Amphytrion is a different person in the last act, when he is brought back to Thebes to answer to the charge of 'gemeine[s] Doppelspiel'. Here, as he faces the people in a mood of bewildered defiance, we see the irony of his statement regarding his journey into the mountains – 'Die Götter waren günstig mir' (490).

It is clear from Amphytrion's utterances and behaviour in the play that Adolf Hitler was not merely the initial inspiration for Kaiser's portrait – he was actually used as a specific model for the character.

Chapter IV – Zeus : Seducer or Benefactor?

Wittkowski, in his review of the plays that preceded Kleist's *Amphitryon*, after referring to the fact that the lost play of Aeschylus was a tragedy, poses this basic question that the *Amphitryon* stories present:

Ist der Besuch des Gottes wirklich, wie die Religion will, Wohltat, Gnade, Auszeichnung? Oder ist er Beleidigung der Menschen und Mißbrauch der göttlichen Übermacht? Oder schärfer zugespitzt: Hört darum, weil es ein Gott war, die erschlichene Umarmung auf, Betrug und Ehebruch zu sein? Kann der Rang des Gottes den Namen des Verbrechens auslöschen und in Segen umwandeln?¹

This question applies to *Zweimal Amphitryon* no less than to the other plays that incorporate this motif, but with the added complication that Kaiser's Zeus also appears as a stern castigator of mankind and as a deliberate sentencing judge so far as *Amphitryon* is concerned. Whatever the answer in respect of his relationship with Alkmene, it has further to be considered whether the judgmental role is to be seen as consistent with his behaviour. That issue will be dealt with in a later chapter.

In none of the stories in the Luthbert tradition is any relationship formed between the god and Alkmene. Their god plays no actual part in the action. Though he bears the responsibility for the deception, he is the unseen manipulator of events. In *Zweimal Amphitryon*, on the other hand, the relationship between Zeus and Alkmene is a crucial element in the story, and, in view of the change in their

¹ Wittkowski (1978) 26.

respective characters, it differs markedly from the corresponding relationship in the earlier plays based on Greek mythology.

Kaiser's Zeus is very far removed from the philandering god of the Greeks, whose 'power [...] is manifest not only in battle and victory, but also in inexhaustible sexual potency. The host of children sired by Zeus is astonishing both in quantity and in quality, and the stream of goddesses and mortal women who shared his bed is no less so. Late mythographers counted one hundred and fifteen women ...'² Others besides Alkmene mentioned in the *Iliad* include Danaë, the mother of Perseus, Semele, the mother of Dionysus, and Europa, whose son was Minos.³

Not less astonishing than his sexual potency is the variety of ruses to which the god was reduced in order to achieve his object. To seduce Europa, for example, he transformed himself into the shape of a bull, captivating her by his beauty and apparent gentleness. When she got on his back, he swam away with her to Crete.⁴ Europa is one of the three women whom Kleist's Jupiter refers to in rebuking Alkmene for her initial rejection of the possibility that she has been visited by the god. The other two are Leda, whom Zeus visited in the shape of a swan,⁵ and

² Burkert (1985) 128.

³ Homer (1951) 14, 319-325.

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. II, 833-875.

⁵ Apollodorus (1921) II, 23.

Callisto, an Arcadian nymph in Diana's train, whose unhappy story is told at length by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.⁶

It is with this background of myth⁷ that Mercury in the Prologue to Plautus' *Amphitruo* is able to say to the audience that he thinks they are aware what his father is like in the matter of love affairs and know what a great lover he can be when he chooses.⁸ And, later, on hearing Jupiter assuring Alkmene how much he loves her, Mercury comments in an aside that, if Juno were to find out about all these goings-on of her husband's, he would probably much prefer to be Amphitryon than himself.⁹

Jupiter is thus running true to form in his seduction of Alkmene and his adulterous relationship with her, and (if we except Burmeister's play, which stands alone) the basic image of a god enamoured of a mortal and coming down to earth to enjoy a night of love with her is preserved until we get to Kaiser's play. In the Prologue to Molière's play, for example, Mercury, in explaining to Night Jupiter's purpose in requesting that she hold back the day, tells her that it is

⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. II, 409-507. In this version, Jupiter saw Callisto one afternoon when she was resting in a wood and approached her in the guise of Diana. She greeted him joyfully but his kisses and his rough embrace revealed the deception and, though she fought him with all her strength, her struggles were to no avail. When Diana became aware of Callisto's pregnancy, she dismissed her and after the child was born Juno changed his mother into a bear. Eventually both she and her son were turned into stars by Jupiter.

⁷ Greek mythology was imported into Rome along with the Greek deities, though the extent of Roman belief in those gods is doubtful. See, for example, Segal (1987) 186-187.

⁸ nam ego uos nouisse credo iam ut sit pater meus,
quam liber harum rerum multarum siet
quantusque amator siet quod complacitum est semel.
(104-106)

⁹ edepol ne illa si istis rebus te sciat operam dare,
ego faxim ted Amphitruonem esse malis quam Iouem.
(510-511)

Pour certaine douce aventure
 Qu'un nouvel amour lui fournit.
 Ses pratiques, je crois, ne vous sont pas nouvelles:
 Bien souvent pour la terre il néglige les cieux ...
 (51-54)¹⁰

And the same holds good for Falk's play, despite the somewhat different character of his Jupiter. As has already been noted, he actually abandons his plan to seduce Alkmene when he realises the extent of her attachment to her husband. In the course of their scene together she tells him she has asked Jupiter in prayer to ensure that no alien love should come between Amphitryon, herself and their child (this last an innovation of the author's) and she claims to have received signs that the god has heard her and given her the assurance she wants. On this, Jupiter relinquishes his plan of seduction (1993-2014).

Zeus is a very different character in *Zweimal Amphitryon*. Here there is no indication of earlier amorous adventures on his part and no hint whatever of the 'light-hearted libertine'¹¹ of Molière's play. Instead, the god's purpose in visiting Alkmene is to test the strength of her avowed love for her husband and the sincerity of her prayer for his return even in the shape of a goatherd, the lowliest of creatures. Had she failed the test, the world would have been destroyed, as Zeus tells the assembled citizens in his final speech.

¹⁰ It seems a new amour of his
 Invites to gallant escapade.
 You are, I'm sure, no stranger to his practices.
 Quite often for the earth-plane he deserts the skies.

¹¹ Shero (1956) 218, quoted in an earlier chapter.

Verlorenes Geschlecht - verräterische Art
 geschaffner Wesen. Eure Zeit war um.
 Beschlossen war's im Rat der Götter. Auf
 Olympos' Gipfel waren wir versammelt.
 Ich selbst erhob die Klage wider euch,
 ihr Menschen - und erbot mich mit der Blitze
 entladner Kraft euch zu vernichten: so
 daß nicht der Schatten eines Menschen noch
 der Erde breite Fläche schreitend schwärzte! - -
 (511-512)

What stayed his hand was a voice from earth – Alkmene's desperate prayer after her
 abandonment by Amphitryon.

Da mitten in der Klage stockt' ich. Eine Stimme
 aus irdischem Bereiche stieg zu mir
 und war ein Summen erst verhaltner Bitte
 und dann im Ausbruch unverhüllten Flehns
 Alkmenes Stimme!- - Sie erbat sich in
 der niedrigsten Gestalt Amphitryon -
 als Ziegenhirt im zott'gen Ziegenfell!- -
 Und ich beschloß die Menschenfrau zu prüfen,
 wie ihr der schlechte Ziegenhirt genüge,
 der nur ein Mensch war - weiter nichts als Mensch!- -
 (512)

So far as Zeus's initial appearance is concerned, therefore, the justification is obvious. The huge gulf between the deceit and what it was capable of avoiding, namely, the destruction of mankind, provides a ready answer to criticism of the former up to this point. However, Zeus does not abandon the deception once he is satisfied of Alkmene's sincerity, but, under cover of his false identity, goes on to seduce her and make her pregnant, and to seriously mislead the Elders by his false account of what had transpired between Amphitryon and the Captains after the fall of Pharsala. On any view of the matter, his conduct towards Alkmene is discreditable since it causes her to commit adultery, but in present-day terms it may be seen as worse than that. In the United Kingdom, California and New Zealand, for example,

the god's act would come within the express definition of the offence of rape, by reason of his impersonation of Alkmene's husband,¹² and in an increasing number of jurisdictions the absence of genuine consent, rather than the use of actual force, is becoming accepted as the essential feature of that offence.

Recognition of this modern development serves to underline the male-oriented approach in the earliest plays, where it is the husband, rather than the wife herself, whose reaction to the god's deceitful relationship with the latter is important. Although Plautus' Alkmene is strong in defending herself against Amphitryon's accusation of adultery on his return from the war, her disappearance from the stage before the end of the play leaves no opportunity for any indication of her reaction to the knowledge of her seduction by Jupiter. Amphitryon's reaction is clear, however. He proclaims himself content to be sharing his property with Jupiter. 'pol me hau paenitet', he says, 'si licet boni dimidium mihi diuidere cum Ioue' (1124-1125). His reference to his wife as one of his possessions ('boni') completes the picture of the position of women in early Roman society that is presented by Mercury's bland announcement to the audience that his father has 'borrowed'¹³ Alkmene.

It may be doubtful, as has been suggested, whether the Roman of Plautus' time

¹² The U.K. legislation is now contained in s. 1 (1) of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, and the N.Z. legislation in s. 128A of the Crimes Act 1961, as inserted by s. 2 of the Crimes Amendment Act (No.3) 1985. For information as to Californian law, see C. Le Grand, 'Rape and Rape Laws: Sexism in Society and Law'. *California Law Review* (61 (1973) 919-941) 920.

¹³ is amare occepit Alcumenam clam uirum,
usuramque eius corporis cepit sibi, ...
(107-108)

would really react as Amphitryon did,¹⁴ but there is no doubt about the Roman attitude to a wife's adultery. It is exemplified by the story related by the Roman historian, Livy, of the rape of Lucretia, a Roman matron, by the King's son, Sextus Tarquinius. In Livy's account, Lucretia resisted Tarquin's inducements, both promise and threat, until he threatened to kill his own slave with her and put their bodies together in bed, so that they would appear to have been surprised in adultery. She then submitted, but afterwards sent for her husband and her father and after telling them what had happened plunged a dagger into her breast. She had accepted their assurance that she was guiltless, because it is the mind that sins, not the body, but, though she absolved herself from blame, she killed herself so that (according to Livy) 'Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve'.¹⁵

It is unlikely these words were ever actually used, but were instead invented by the author to suit his purpose. Livy was writing almost two centuries after *Amphitruo* appeared, but at a time when Augustus was trying to establish a programme of moral reform that would embody what were regarded as the traditional values of Roman society. Livy's stories have to be viewed in that context – in the words of one writer (with specific reference to the Lucretia story) as 'a powerful aetiological myth,

¹⁴ Segal (1987) 187. See also the pages following that page on the question of adultery on the Roman stage.

¹⁵ Livy (1960) 99. Like Ulysses' wife, Penelope, Lucretia was employing her time spinning while her husband was away and Kleist's Alkmene was likewise engaged when Amphitryon returned (815).

intended to rehearse and to explain the origins of certain fundamental Roman ideals'.¹⁶

In these circumstances, it is obvious that Plautus has been careful to counter any criticism of his action in making a wife's adultery (albeit unwitting and with a god) the subject of a play by putting a statement of those traditional values in Alkmene's mouth when she is defending herself against Amphitryon's accusations. There she speaks of her modesty and purity as part of her dowry.¹⁷ And Jupiter shows concern for her good name in arranging for his son to be born at the same time as Amphitryon's so that no one will suspect Alkmene of adultery. Mercury, announcing this, says that it would not be fair for gods to allow the blame for their doings to be ascribed to a human being.¹⁸

The complaisant attitude shown by Amphitryon changes with the later plays, where the husband's honour is clearly seen to be impugned by the adultery of his wife. Three European plays of the 15th and 16th centuries had led the way in this direction. In Pandolfo Collenuccio's Italian version of 1487 A.D. Amphitryon greeted the news that he had been cuckolded by the father of the gods by complaining to the

¹⁶ Donaldson (1982) 8. See also Joshel (1992) 114-115.

¹⁷ non ego illám mi dotem duco ésse quae dos dicitur
sed pudicitiam et pudorem et sedatum cupidinem,
deum metum, parentum amorem et cognatum concordiam,
tibi morigera atque ut munifica sim bonis, prosim probis.
(839-842)

¹⁸ nemo id probro
profecto ducet Alcumenae; nam deum
non par uidetur facere, delictum suom
suamque ut culpam expetere in mortalem ut sinat.
(492-495)

sinner's rank deprives his act of its shamefulness and lets it bear a lofty name.²² It is left to Sosia to utter the most telling comment on the affair. Referring to the 'honour' that (according to the First Captain) is conferred on his master by Jupiter's sharing of his 'goods', he says: 'On appelle cela lui sucrer le breuvage' (in the English idiom, 'that is called sugaring the pill') (145).

In Molière's play, Mercury in the Prologue reflects the attitude of Rotrou's Mercury, when he says:

Et suivant ce qu'on peut être,
Les choses changent de nom.
(130-131)²³

However, Molière's *Amphitryon* maintains silence at the end, even after Jupiter has assured him that Alkmene's love is his alone, and one can only assume that he is unimpressed by the god's assertion that 'Un partage avec Jupiter / N'a rien du tout qui déshonore' (1898-1899).²⁴ Once again it is Sosia who makes the apt comment, in his paraphrase of the words used in Rotrou's play – 'Le seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule' (1913).

It is when we come to Kleist's play that Alkmene's reaction to the god's

²² Le rang des vicieux ôte la honte aux vices,
Et donne de beaux noms à de honteux offices;
(84)

²³ Depending on one's situation,
Things have a way of changing names.
Cf. the similar claim that Dryden puts into the mouth of Jupiter himself, with his arrogant statement that '... pow'r Omnipotent can do no wrong ...' (155).

²⁴ A portion shared with Jupiter
In no wise lessens human worth.

and at the last Jupiter has to admit defeat.

Et c'est moi, dans cette aventure,
 Qui, tout dieu que je suis, dois être le jaloux.
 Alcmène est toute à toi
 [...]

 Que Jupiter, orné de sa gloire immortelle,
 Par lui-même n'a pu triompher de sa foi,
 Et que ce qu'il a reçu d'elle
 N'a par son cœur ardent été donné qu'à toi.
 (1903-1905, 1909-1912)²⁶

When Kleist's Jupiter tries to persuade Alcmene to differentiate between husband and lover, he does so in terms that are very close to a revelation that they are in fact two different beings. Having asked her, as he is taking his leave after their first meeting, to say whether it was her husband or her lover she had then received (455-457), he goes on to speak of Amphytrion in openly disparaging terms.

Wozu den eitlen Feldherrn der Thebaner
 Einmischen hier, der für ein großes Haus
 Jüngst eine reiche Fürstentochter freite?
 Was sagst du? Sieh, ich möchte deine Tugend
 Ihm, jenem öffentlichen Gecken, lassen,
 Und mir, mir deine Liebe vorbehalten.
 (478-483)

Alcmene assumes he is speaking in jest – 'Amphytrion! Du scherzest', she says (484) – but she does eventually concede the distinction her supposed husband makes, to the extent of saying that, as the gods have united husband and lover in the one person, she forgives the lover for her husband's misdeeds (490-492). At the end of that same

²⁶ In this adventure I am due,
 Although I am a god, to feel the jealous pain.
 Alcmena is entirely yours,
 [...]

 That in all his immortal glory Jupiter
 In his own person could not shake her loyalty,
 And all that he received from her
 Was given to you alone in her true constancy.

scene, after Jupiter has plainly indicated his imposture by saying to her: 'Versprich,

This seems merely to confirm her already exalted opinion of her husband and, still unsuspecting, she reacts like Plautus' and Molière's heroines, and defends herself vigorously, when Amphitryon himself appears and is hurt and bewildered at what is to him the coldness of her welcome after his five-month absence. At one point she addresses him as 'Abscheulicher' (975) and she promises that he will be free of all ties to her before the day is out (989f.). It is the discovery, a short time later, that the initial on the headband Jupiter gave her is a 'J', not an 'A', that recalls to her mind her supposed husband's extraordinary appearance and behaviour on that earlier occasion and causes a complete loss of confidence. Hence, when Jupiter returns Alkmene begs him on her knees to tell her whether or not it was he who gave her the headband, and passionately declares:

Gabst du ihn nicht, und leugnest du ihn mir,
Verleugnest ihn, so sei der Tod mein Los
Und ewge Nacht begrabe meine Schmach.
(1242-1244)

In the long scene that follows (II, 5), Jupiter appears in a very different light from anything that is seen in earlier works. His objective in this crucial scene is a matter of controversy. Some writers have seen him in a pedagogic role. For example, Gadamer postulates that his aim is to teach Alkmene to trust in her own deepest feelings. His view is summed up in the following statement:

Der innere Sinn dieses Gesprächs scheint mir darin zu bestehen, daß der Gott Alkmene lehren will, das untrügliche Gefühl, das in ihr ist, nicht zu verleugnen, und daß sie, wenn sie an sich selbst zweifelt, auch an der Göttlichkeit des Göttlichen zweifelt, und umgekehrt, daß wenn sie zu ihrem eigenen Gefühle steht, sie den Gott in seiner wahren Göttlichkeit sein und erscheinen läßt.²⁹

²⁹ Gadamer (1961) 344. See also Ryan (1969) – 'Zu einem solchen neuen Verständnis ihrer Liebe zu Amphitryon will Jupiter sie bewegen' (91).

Others have seen Jupiter in a different light. The view of Crosby, for instance, as also Stahl, is that the god is endeavouring to win Alkmene's love for himself and that he pursues this aim with every means in his power.³⁰ Graham, in discussing the work as a whole, regards Jupiter, as well as Amphitryon, as 'an aspect of Kleist's own divided self' and suggests that his whole endeavour in the play is to penetrate to Alkmene's very soul, stripped of its human conditioning, in order to be able to 'gaze upon himself as he "really" is – the infinite, and infinitely narcissistic, lover'.³¹

Whatever his motives, Jupiter puts Alkmene through a considerable ordeal, as, for instance, in such equivocal replies to her frantic questions about the previous night as 'Ich wars' and then: 'Seis wer es wolle' (1266). In consequence, despite his positive assurance that she is guiltless (a fact that she herself acknowledges when she says: 'Ich Schändlich-hintergangene!' (1287)), she remains firm in her intention to leave him, if not to die (1299, 1319, 1331-1332).

Her answer to his final question as to how she would feel if she were in the arms of the god and her husband appeared is not unambiguous, but Jupiter's response, which (to the reader, if not to Alkmene) amounts to an unmistakable affirmation of his divinity (1564-1573), is joyful. There is, however, no ambiguity about Alkmene's statement in the last scene of the play, when she is called on to say which of the two apparent Amphitryons is the real one. Then she clearly identifies Jupiter in the words: 'Hier dieser ist Amphitryon, ihr Freunde' (2231) and follows

³⁰ Crosby (1974) 109-110; Stahl (1961) 64-65. See also Wittkowski (1978) 139.

³¹ Graham (1977). The quotations are from pp 88 & 87 respectively.

this up with virulent abuse of her husband, whom she accordingly believes to be her seducer.

The view one takes of Jupiter's purpose in his exchanges with Alkmene will colour one's assessment of the way the morality of his behaviour towards her is to be viewed, but the problem does not exist in relation to Amphitryon. Like his counterpart in earlier plays, Amphitryon sees the situation in terms of its effect on himself, as when he utters the following bitter complaint: 'Weib, Ehre, Herrschaft, Namen stehlen lassen!' (1924). This is reflected in the god's words when he and Amphitryon confront each other in the presence of the Commanders whom Sosia, on Jupiter's instructions, has invited to a feast, and Jupiter says: 'Es soll der ganze Weltenkreis erfahren,/ Daß keine Schmach Amphitryon getroffen' (1910-1911). And the same attitude is evident also in the words of both at the end, when Jupiter speaks to Amphitryon of 'Lohn' in relation to his experience 'in deinem Hause' (emphasis added) and Amphitryon asks for satisfaction in the form of a heroic son (2316-2334). In the words of Wittkowski: 'Jupiter zahlt für die genossene Nacht'.³² The affront to Amphitryon has been redressed by the revelation that his wife's seducer was a god and the propitiatory granting of his request for the son he desires.

The focus on the husband's reaction to the god's seduction of his wife disappears in both this century's plays being considered. Giraudoux's answer to the problem of Jupiter's morality is to make him respond to Alkmene's distress when she

³² Wittkowski (1978) 198.

suspects she has been seduced by him, by foregoing his second night of love with her and granting both her and Amphitryon forgetfulness in relation to the whole episode (169,170). In *Zweimal Amphitryon* Alkmene's adultery is not the central issue and in fact is not even referred to, but it still occurs, though no suspicion ever attaches to her. The question of Zeus's morality in continuing his deception once he has achieved his initial object of testing her sincerity in order to decide the fate of the world has therefore still to be considered, and the answer is to be sought in the various changes made by Kaiser in character and plot. The character of Alkmene, her reaction to Amphitryon's desertion of her on their wedding night, and the nature of her relationship with Zeus, which is untarnished by any misunderstandings and recriminations over the identity of her lover, are all material factors.

Kaiser's Alkmene is a different person from the heroine of either Plautus' or Molière's play, each of whom is a distinct personality, firm, outspoken in her own defence and not at all disposed to put up with Amphitryon's strictures. Both characters are hurt and angry at being contradicted by Amphitryon and accused by him of adultery. Plautus' Alkmene shows her feelings plainly after Amphitryon's departure to seek a witness on his own behalf. She says she cannot remain in the house any longer after such dreadful accusations³³ and that she will leave her husband unless he apologizes (886-890).

Molière's Alkmene, addressing Amphitryon as 'unworthy husband' ('indigne

³³ Durare nequeo in aedibus. ita me probri,
stupri, dedecoris a uiro argutam meo!
(882-883)

her husband. The more submissive personality of Rotrou's Alkmene, which makes her very different from those who preceded her, can be seen in her use of the pronoun 'vous' when speaking to her husband, whereas both he and Jupiter, in the role of her husband, address her with the singular pronoun.³⁵ Moreover, this Alkmene regards it as her duty to do whatever her husband wishes. When he suggests dissolution of their marriage she says that, whatever the result of his investigations, if that is what he wants she must consent.³⁶

Kaiser's Alkmene has considerable affinity with Kleist's character, most noticeably in her idolization of her husband – but with much less objective justification than is the case in Kleist's play. Her attitude is epitomized in the answer she gives to her nurse, when the latter finds out the nature of the message that Alkmene sent to Amphitryon in camp, and says to her: 'Alkmene - wie du dich erniedrigst!'. To this Alkmene replies: 'Ich kann nur steigen, wenn ich ihn ganz liebe' (444).

This Alkmene is young and immature and her immaturity is clearly seen when the content of her message to Amphitryon is revealed. As she confesses to the nurse, she had asked Amphitryon to let her come to his tent, to make it comfortable for him and to keep the insects from him while he slept (444). She must have known that a

³⁵ See the exchange between husband and wife at the beginning of p. 110 and that between Jupiter and Alkmene at the end of Act III, Sc.2 (116). In Molière's play, both Amphitryon, and Jupiter in the role of Amphitryon, use the plural pronoun in addressing Alkmene, as she does to them.

³⁶ Soit qu'il prouve ma faute, ou me trouve innocente,
Si vous le désirez, il faut que j'y consente.
(111)

woman has no place in a military camp,³⁷ but she was prompted to make this unrealistic request by her overwhelming longing to be near him and to serve him.

At the beginning of the play, we learn from the Maidservant how eagerly her mistress has awaited the Messenger's return, how the slightest sound raised her hopes and made everyone hold their breath in case he had arrived. And she tells of one occasion when Alkmene was enjoying harvesting olives with her women and suddenly, when they were resting at midday, she began to worry that the Messenger might have returned while they were away from the house, and she decided to go back. But she did not require the servants' return – '... sie befiehlt / uns niemals!', the Messenger is told (431-432). That they nevertheless returned with her is evidence of their regard for her.

When the Messenger she had sent to the camp returns, Alkmene remarks on the length of time he has been away, but does not reproach him for it. Instead, she simply assumes he has been held up by all sorts of difficulties on the way – the absence of a defined path, wolves in the forest, swollen streams with no place to cross, the lack of shade and water and even an earthquake, she imagines (434-435). She is astonished and bewildered when he denies that he had to surmount any of these difficulties but she still offers no reproach (436); and, despondent and temporarily disoriented as she appears once she has finally absorbed the truth – that Amphytrion has refused to receive her message – she does not forget to offer the Messenger his reward 'weil Warten schwer ist' (438) (something she herself very well knows).

³⁷ As Amphytrion later says: 'Frauen - was suchen Frauen/ in eines Feldherrn Zelt!' (499).

The Messenger points out that Alkmene's message to Amphitryon is returned 'mit heilem Siegel' (438) – a purely factual statement on his part but acquiring significance later as we learn that Alkmene is still a virgin because of Amphitryon's precipitate departure from the wedding celebrations. The Nurse also speaks metaphorically of Alkmene's youth and innocence, in her speech shortly after, when she is reminding Alkmene of her care of the girl through adolescence. In part, she says:

Entsinnst du dich
des Sprießens jenes Frühlings, der die Knospe
zur Blüte trieb - die aufgetanen Kelches
mit Lust sich sättigte, um Frucht zu reifen?
(439)

Alkmene has a need for love. She is very much in love with Amphitryon, though it is a love bordering on idolatry – neither mature nor realistic. It might be truer to say she is in love with love. At the same time there is a pronounced physical element in her attitude, the nature of which is revealed partly in what she says to the Nurse after the Messenger has left and partly in her prayer to Zeus. She concludes her confession to the Nurse that her marriage has not been consummated by metaphorically comparing herself to another wronged woman of myth, Philomela, whose name is perpetuated in English in the poetical use of the term 'Philomel' for the nightingale. The wrong suffered by Alkmene is the very reverse of that done to

Philomela, but Alkmene sees it as an act of violence against the integrity of her person.³⁸

Es schluchzte nur noch eine Nachtigall.
 War es die Nachtigall? War ich's, Alkmene? - - -
 (442)

However, when the Nurse responds to the confession with the words 'Du sollst befreit sein', she immediately asks: 'Wovon soll ich frei sein?' (442) – a departure from the earlier plays in which Alkmene is very ready to contemplate divorce in the face of Amphitryon's rejection of her.

Again she says: 'Müssen - - lieben muß ich Amphitryon!' (443). However, she obviously knows nothing of her husband, who she admits to Zeus only looked at her fleetingly, and in talking of him she mentions no personal qualities, real or imagined. Instead she tells the Nurse: 'Du flüsterst seinen Namen – dieses Wort,/ das deine Lippen ohne Willen formen,/ so liebst du es' (443)³⁹ and she makes frequent mention of the rapture of Amphitryon's kisses. These kisses are the first she has experienced and her response has been such that she cannot conceive of any other lover.

³⁸ Philomela was raped or seduced by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who cut out her tongue to prevent her telling anyone. However, she managed to let her sister, Prokne, know what had happened by means of a piece of embroidery and when, eventually, the two women were pursued by Tereus the gods turned him into a hoopoe and the two women into a nightingale and a swallow. In the original Greek version it was Prokne who became the nightingale and Philomela the swallow. By Ovid's time the roles had become confused, with Philomela (despite the cut tongue) turning into the nightingale and her sister into the swallow. See Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, (Baltimore, 1993) 240-241. The Roman version seems to be the one to which Kaiser alludes, with the reference to the nightingale sobbing.

³⁹ Cf. Jason's joyous declaration on hearing Medea speak his name for the first time in Grillparzer's *Die Argonauten* (cited in Chapter III).

O holder Klang!
 'Jason!' wie ist der Name doch so schön,
 Seit du ihn sprachst mit deinen süßen Lippen.
 (1165-1167)

Es war sein Mund, der sich auf meinen neigte
 zuerst im unerfahr'nen Kuß. Von welchem Mund
 soll ich mich wieder küssen lassen? Blüht
 zweimal die Blume aus dem einz'gen Frühling?
 (443)

Even to Zeus, whose first words on his appearance are: 'Erkennst du mich?', she says: 'Erkenn' ich nicht den Mund, der sich zuerst/ auf meinen neigte?' (447). But that this is not enough for her she makes plain in their immediately following exchange, when, in answer to Zeus's question: 'Ist ein Kuß so viel?' she replies: 'So wenig, wenn es nur ein Kuß ist'.

Her longing for Amphytrion, and her despair at his departure, are such that she loses all desire to live and prays to Zeus to let her die. At the beginning of the prayer, she refers to her husband as 'den einz'gen Mann [...] den strahlenden Amphytrion',⁴⁰ and describes herself as presumptuous for wanting him for herself. She goes on:

Zu dreist
 erhob ich meinen Blick zu ihm, der mich
 nur flüchtig ansah und in seinem Kuß
 mehr Glück vergeudete als ich ihm wert
 sein konnte. Wer bin ich? Mit welchem Schatz
 vergelte ich Empfang'nes?
 (445)

This attitude might suggest that it is the glory surrounding a renowned general that is the source of Amphytrion's attraction for her. At the end of her prayer, she expressly denies this, first telling Zeus:

Ich suchte nicht
 den Glanz, als ich Amphytrion mich nahte,
 und was ihn rühmte, taugte mir gering.
 (446):

⁴⁰ The word 'strahlend' is also used by Kleist's Alkmene to describe the appearance of her supposed husband when he came to her the previous night (1195).

and then asking him to send Amphitryon to her 'im rauhen Ziegenfell'.

Her words are a reminder of the attitude shown by Kleist's heroine, when she describes the glory Amphitryon has achieved as 'lästig'. She confesses to Jupiter:

Ach, wie
So läst'ig ist so vieler Ruhm, Geliebter!
Wie gern gäb ich das Diadem, das du
Erkämpfst, für einen Strauß von Veilchen hin,
Um eine niedre Hütte eingesammelt.
Was brauchen wir, als nur uns selbst?
(423-428)

She does admit to enjoying the thought that he belongs to her, when the people are cheering him, but considers it a 'flüchtge Reiz' that is hardly enough to compensate for her fears (431-436).

Both Plautus' and Molière's characters are different in this respect. The Alkmene of Plautus bemoans her loneliness when Amphitryon has left but adds that she can bear it if he comes back covered with glory.⁴¹ Similarly, Molière's Alkmene, in her first scene with Jupiter, admits to him as her supposed husband that:

Je prends, Amphitryon, grande part à la gloire
Que répandent sur vous vos illustres exploits;
Et l'éclat de votre victoire
Sait toucher de mon cœur les sensibles endroits ...
(542-545)⁴²

id solacio est.
apsit, dum mode laude parta
domum recipiat se;
(643-645)

⁴² The glory of your exploits casts its light on me,
And in your fame, Amphitryon, I have my part;
The brilliance of your victory
Affects the tenderest recesses of my heart ...

Despite her proclaimed lack of concern for glory, Kaiser's Alkmene is conscious that there is a gulf between herself, an immature young girl, and this experienced commander of an army. She uses the terms 'Vergehen' and 'Frevel' to describe what she sees as her presumption and asks Zeus to inflict only a mild punishment (445).⁴³ She goes on to pray for immediate death, claiming that she is already without life. Then, in a reminder of Kleist's Penthesilea, who wills herself to die on realizing what she has done to Achilles,⁴⁴ she goes on:

Machtlos ist das Herz.
Es braucht kein Schwert, um es zu treffen
mit tödlicher Verwundung. Man stirbt still,
wenn man im Herzen stirbt. Sei still, mein Herz,
Still' es, o Zeus! - - -

(446)

When it is clear she is not going to die, she asks Zeus to send Amphytrion to her 'so dürftig/ und schmäglich wie die Ziegenhirten sind' (446). In this way, she feels, she will not be 'zu niedrig ihn zu lieben' (447) – she can show that it is not the famous general that she loves, but someone who, in the words quoted earlier that Zeus speaks to the people of Thebes, 'nur ein Mensch [ist] - weiter nichts als Mensch! - -' (512).

This is the woman whom Zeus comes down to earth to test and this is the woman of whom he would afterwards say to the assembled Thebans:

ich trank aus diesem Quell,
der Menschenliebe heißt - und bin ein Sel'ger,
zum andernmal beseligt durch Alkmene! - -
(512)

⁴³ Jupiter suggests that Alkmene is being punished in Kleist's *Amphytrion* (1467-1468).

⁴⁴ Kleist 1, 321 (3025-3034 & flg. stage direction).

This is a reminder of Kleist's play, in which the words 'Seligkeit' and 'selig' occur in several places (1499, 1570 & 2307).

The suddenness of Zeus/Amphitryon's appearance creates no suspicion of his identity in Alkmene's mind, as is clear as soon as she realizes what he is wearing. Then, aware of the importance to Amphitryon of his glorious suit of armour, she wants to ask Zeus to send him away again before he begins to hate her for having prayed for his return in the garb of a goatherd (448-449). But she loses all sense of reality in his presence, as her 'Sing' weiter, Gott' and the stage direction '*traumverloren*' at the end of the scene indicate (450): as also her words at the resumed marriage feast, when she says to Zeus: 'Verschwand nicht Wirklichkeit,/ als du erschienst?' (466). Kleist's Alkmene, too, had seen the god's appearance as a dream – 'Er stand, ich weiß nicht, vor mir, wie im Traum ...' (1192) and her perception of her visitor as god-like is mirrored in Kaiser's Alkmene's words to Zeus: 'Der vom Himmel du' (467), obviously spoken without any appreciation of their veracity, and, in the face of his goatherd attire, with unconscious irony. Again, in answer to Zeus's hint of his divinity in the words: 'Du könntest einen Gott zum zweifeln [sic] bringen/ an seiner Göttlichkeit ...' she tells him: 'Ich spüre/ nur das Geheimnis deiner Göttlichkeit,/ die Liebe ist' (476-477).

There are no direct clues to Zeus's identity, but apart from the sudden appearance it is clear from many of the things he says, particularly when he makes a literal response to a figurative remark of Alkmene's – for example, in the following

exchange, which seems to have its inspiration in Joseph von Eichendorff's poem *Mondnacht*⁴⁵:

Alkmene: Der vom Himmel du.
 Zeus: Und du?
 Alkmene: Ein irdisch Weib und immer nur Alkmene.
 Zeus: So hat der Himmel mit der Erde sich
 zum wunderbarsten Bund vereint und wieder
 weiht dieser Kuß ihn.
 (467)

In the word 'Bund' Zeus uses the term applied in the German version of the Bible to the covenant between God and Israel.⁴⁶

Alkmene, however, remains blissfully unaware of his actual divinity, partly because of her almost idolatrous feelings towards Amphytrion and partly because of the dreamlike state in which she experiences her encounter with Zeus. She uses the term 'unbewußt' in relation to herself and when Zeus questions the word she makes the already quoted comment about the flight of reality on his appearance. Zeus makes it plain this is his doing when, shortly before they leave the marriage feast, he refers to the removal of the veil 'den dir ein Gott zur rechten Zeit geliehn' (476).

Again, speaking in response to her reference to the heart's 'Gesang', he says:

Lausch' ihm, Liebste. Er
 soll übertrönen [sic] wechselnde Gespräche,
 die unaufhaltsam sind und deren Sinn
 sich unverwirrend dir verschließen soll.

⁴⁵ The first verse of this poem reads:
 Es war, als hätt' der Himmel
 Die Erde still geküßt,
 Daß sie im Blütenschimmer
 Von ihm nun träumen müßt'.

⁴⁶ Exodus 24: 3-8.

Tauch' du in Träume und von neuem lass'
 die Wirklichkeit zur Wolke werden ...
 (467)

There is no doubt about his delight in this experience of earthly love or of his tenderness for Alkmene. In their first scene together she smilingly reminds him that he, Amphytrion, thought more of destroying Pharsala than he did of being with her and the strength of Zeus's response to her is clear from his reply.

Blinde gibt es,
 die jährlings sehend werden. Taube hören
 den mind'sten Laut. So taucht es mir
 von deines Auges Grund entgegen -
 erschütternd menschlich, daß ein Gott sich sehnt
 nach einem Menschen. - - -
 Sei dieser Mensch du. Klingen will dein Herz
 ich hören, das so sanften Schlags
 doch aller Kämpfe Tosen übertönt,
 die sich die fürchtbar aufgewühlten Menschen
 mit blut'gem Eifer liefern. Hoffen lass'
 den Gott durch dich, Alkmene, und den Gott
 dir danken - - - -
 durch schönere Geburt.

(449-450)

In the words 'daß ein Gott sich sehnt/ nach einem Menschen' one can hear an echo of Kleist's Jupiter's complaint of the emptiness of Olympus without love (1519-1533); and, just as Kleist's Jupiter saw his Alkmene as a special person because of her final response to him (1569-1573), so Kaiser's Alkmene is a special person to his Zeus. Her voice has succeeded in drowning out the terrible noise of warfare among men and she is seen to bear the ultimate responsibility for man's redemption.⁴⁷

The reference to the god's gratitude is also a reminder of Kleist's Jupiter when,

⁴⁷ Cf. Lindberger (1956) 212.

in his role as Amphitryon endeavouring to comfort Alkmene over the changed initial, he tells her:

Wer deine Schwelle auch betreten hat,
 Mich immer hast du, Teuerste, empfangen,
 Und für jedwede Gunst, die du ihm schenktest,
 Bin ich dein Schuldner, und ich danke dir.
 (1269-1272)

There is, however, an interesting difference in the two passages. In Kaiser's play, Zeus, though speaking as Amphitryon, refers to the god's gratitude and really makes his identity plain, though Alkmene in her dreamlike state does not grasp this. Kleist's Jupiter is also referring to his own gratitude, but ambiguously clothes it in words that are on the face of it applicable to Amphitryon.

The relationship between Zeus and Alkmene is encapsulated in the banquet scene by her reference to 'das Glück [...], das mich jetzt durchrinnt/ mit heißer Flut und matter Ebbe wie/ das Meer erbebt nicht stärker aus der Tiefe' (466-467), to which his response is to tell her: 'Ich zieh' des Himmels Rund/ noch ein, um so zu messen, was ich selbst/ empfinde' (467).

Although it is obvious that Kaiser's Alkmene has a number of features in common with Kleist's heroine, her relationship with Zeus is entirely different and it is through that relationship that Kaiser presents his justification for Zeus's behaviour and gives his answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter. At his trial he had made clear his view that, at least for him as a superior being, the end sought was a complete justification for the means adopted to attain it, and that

approach is reflected here. Zeus's attitude towards Alkmene is one of tender love – he is the husband that she longed for in *Amphitryon* and her happiness in his presence is very obvious. His prolongation of the deception and his adultery are the result of his realization of Alkmene's need and of the outrageous nature of *Amphitryon*'s behaviour towards her, and he accordingly offers her the comfort and happiness of his love. And it is to her that his promise of a heroic son is given. Diebold's summing up of the situation in his review of the first performance is apt.

Kein Räuber ist [der Gott] mehr, sondern ein Tröster und Spender der Liebe.
Kein Ehebrecher - wo die Ehe nicht einmal vollzogen war - sondern ein
Rächer verschmähter Liebe - und ein Richter des Ehefrevlers *Amphitryon*.
Und so erscheint er als sein 'besseres Ich'.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Diebold (1944) 4.

Chapter V - *The Trial of Amphitryon*

Amphitryon's trial is of interest for at least three reasons – first, because of the possible influence of Kaiser's own experience of the German criminal justice system, second, because its ultimate conclusion in Zeus's condemnation of warfare and his punishment of Amphitryon seems to foreshadow the Nuremberg Trials at the end of World War II and, third, because of the way it is engineered by Zeus. The second of these will be dealt with in a later chapter.

That the trial is part of a plan that took shape in Zeus's mind soon after his appearance on earth can be assumed from the following early exchange between him and Alkmene.

Alkmene:	Niemand kennt vorher, was Zeus beschließt.
Zeus:	Doch er beschloß Amphitryon zu wandeln und einen Weg zu leiten, der ihn zu Alkmene lenkt.
Alkmene:	Bist du nicht schon bei mir?
Zeus:	Ich bin es heut und morgen und die Zeit, die für den Plan bestimmt ist. Das sind Dinge, die mit der Zukunft reifen.

(449)

Zeus thus indicates that this is a new plan, which means that he has been persuaded by Alkmene's joy at his appearance to give up his plan to destroy mankind, in the same way as Falk's Jupiter is diverted from his plan of seduction by Alkmene's prayer.

The trial scene has no counterpart in the earlier plays, though Dryden does introduce a legal flavour with a scene in which his disreputable Judge Gripus is

invited to make a determination between the two claimants. The Master of Amphitryon's ship asks a question to which only Amphitryon would know the answer and the Judge asks the true Amphitryon to answer first. When, together, they answer 'My Lord I told him -' he proclaims ''Tis a plain Case they are both true; for they both speak together: But for more certainty, let the false Amphitryon speak first'. When neither speaks, he goes on: 'Then it's as plain on t'other side, that they are both false Amphitryons' (212).

Dryden's object is obviously to lampoon the workings of the law, but Kaiser treats it seriously. Zeus begins to set the scene for the trial at the renewed marriage feast,¹ when he is questioned by the bewildered Elders about his appearance and the progress of the war that he has left. The Second Elder complains that their anxiety to know what has happened has spoilt their appetite and destroyed their desire for wine, to which, speaking more tellingly than he knows, he adds: '... reift' auch die Traube/ an Hängen des Olymp und gleicht dem Nektar,/ den Götter schmecken' (468). The language is very effective, not merely in its context, but also in its opposition to Amphitryon's mention of wine in the camp before Pharsala. Amphitryon's concern is with the length of time it has taken him to subdue the besieged city and he says, in a passage already partially quoted:

Mir war er Gift
geworden unterm Gaumen and ich spie
ihn weg und hieß den Auswurf, den ich spie:
Pharsala! - So soll schlechter Wein nun heißen,
der allzu träge reifte.

(451)

¹ Noted by Jacobi (1952) 108 and Lindberger (1956) 209.

In response to the concerns of the Elders, Zeus summons a singer to tell the story of the fall of Pharsala. Then at the end he shows a fine touch of divine irony (not apparent to the guests) by crowning the singer with a laurel wreath, the symbol of victory in ancient Greece, with the words:

So krön'
ich dich mit einem Kranz, den laubig auch
verschmähten nicht die Ziegen von Pharsala!
(471)

This is the very reverse of Amphitryon's comment to the Captains: 'Behängt mich nicht mit Lorbeer, der von Blech./ Von tollen Ziegen stammt der Fall Pharsalas' (455).

The introduction of the singer has been compared to the use of choruses in Greek tragedy.² A more apposite reference would be to the story-teller singers who, in ancient times, provided the entertainment at feasts and the like³ and who were the means by which tales such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were handed down in the days before writing.⁴ Kaiser's singer, therefore, is an interesting feature of the distinctive Greek atmosphere he has given to his play. The idea may have been suggested to him by Falk's play, which also includes a singer, Damodokles. He starts to tell Jupiter and Alkmene the story of Zeus and one of his earlier loves, Danaë, but

² Lindberger (1956) 209; Buffinga (1986) 490.

³ As, for instance, the blind singer, Demodokos, at the court of King Alcinous in Homer's *Odyssey* – Homer (1975) 8, 62-82 & 266-366.

⁴ See, for example, E.R. Dodds, 'Homer as Oral Poetry'. Reprint from *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1954) 13-17, in G.S.Kirk (ed.), *The Language and Background of Homer* (Cambridge, 1964) 13-17.

is interrupted by Alkmene, who wants to hear how man can become divine rather than the opposite (1937-1950).⁵

The guests at the feast applaud the singer, but the Elders are nonetheless disappointed that they were not given the opportunity to organize the traditional victory celebration on the hero's return (471-472). Here the words of the First Elder bring to mind the announcement of the Greek victory at Marathon in 490 B.C, through his description of the expected advance appearance of a messenger, '...als sonst der Brauch [...] ein Lorbeerreisig schwenkend...', crying 'Sieg - Sieg - Sieg!' and then dropping dead (471). The speaker concludes his account of the way in which the populace would have welcomed the victors, by claiming that in the face of this wild jubilation the doves would have flown off the roofs, 'als wollten sie auf ihren flinken Schwingen/ das Lob verbreiten, das hier tosend klang!' (472). To the modern reader, the reference to the behaviour of the doves, traditional symbol of peace in the Western World, as an indicator of the universal enthusiasm for a military victory is an exquisite piece of irony.

Zeus's explanation for his omission and for his appearance alone and in goatherd attire is a complete distortion of the facts. He claims that he had to flee the camp in order to save his life – the Officers were ready to kill him (476). First he tells the company:

Ich bin ein Flüchtling - der sein Kleid vertauscht
und niemals sicher vor den Häschern es

⁵ An interesting feature of Falk's choice of subject for the singer is that the son Danaë bore to Zeus, Perseus, was actually Alkmene's grandfather – Apollodorus (1921) I, 163, 165.

zu keiner Stunde ablegt. Schneller nicht
 im Dickicht taucht die Hindin vor dem Pfeil
 des Jägers wie ein Sprung vom Dachsim mir
 - mein Fell beschwert mich nicht - zur Rettung wird.
 Leicht trägt der Lauf von Theben weg mich wie
 - als Ziegenhirt - er vorher mich nach Theben brachte!
 (473)

Then he offers an account of events after the fall of Pharsala in which he both transposes the respective roles of Amphytryon and the Captains, and exaggerates the supposed virulence of the latter. According to him, it was he and not the Officers who wanted to return to Thebes and they who poured scorn on the victory won with the help of the goats and were determined to counterbalance it by a further splendid victory. In his account, he reveals certain things that lie beneath the surface. First, he indicates the importance of booty as a motivating factor in the warfare, by claiming, contrary to fact, that the victory had yielded a vast amount of it (473). Amphytryon's reference to booty in his report on his reconnaissance expedition (492), and again in the course of his defence, makes plain the desire for glory that lies at the back of his plan for further conquest, and also the extent to which that glory depends on the size of the booty. Admitting during his defence that he was wrong in failing to obtain the approval of the Elders for this plan, he says:

... ich hätt
 den Makel mit dem Übermass der Beute
 wie Staub von einem Nagel weggeblasen!-
 (496)

Zeus also elaborates the objections actually raised by the Captains, but attributed to himself, in such a way as to demonstrate Amphytryon's total lack of concern for anyone standing in the way of his ambition. The ordinary soldier taken away from his work, the women left behind, along with the men past fighting age, are

all shown to be the objects of Amphytryon's contempt, whether fully expressed in the original scene or not (474-476). He claims, for instance, that the Officers greeted his reminder of the women waiting at home in Thebes with raucous laughter and scornful words.

*Frauen? - laßt sie fasten.
Ob Mond - ob Sonne oder Sterngelechte:
uns funkelt eine Lanzenpitze heller
als alles Vließ von seid'nem Frauenhaar!
(475)*

When, so he says, he pointed out the need to obtain authority from the Elders for any further expedition, he was told:

*Der Greise Rat
taugt besser nicht als Frauenrat - man soll
sie beide als ganz unvernünftig abtun!
(475-476)*

This claim, springing as it does from Zeus's knowledge of Amphytryon's tyrannical ambitions, is also a reminder of Hitler's disdain for parliamentary-type institutions.⁶

Along with his plan to set the scene for Amphytryon's trial and sentence, Zeus has another reason for this transposal of the parts played by the General and the Captains. As already noted, this effectively makes the point that the responsibility for Amphytryon's plans for further conquest is not his alone. The Captains by their reluctance or inability to control him must bear much of the blame. They are guilty not only of conniving at his murderous and unjustified attack on Pharsala, but also of cravenly giving in to his proposal to go further, despite their awareness of the

⁶ Haffner (1989) 247f.

objections, because of his frenzied reaction to their opposition. This has prompted Szondi's observation:

Obwohl diese den Fakten des zweiten Aktes widerspricht, ist ihr ein Wahrheitsgehalt dennoch eigen. Was im Mund des Betrügers Lüge ist, ist zugleich Wahrheit im Munde des Gottes.⁷

Having heard Zeus's false account, the Elders lose no time in deciding to send three of their number to the camp to confront Amphytrion. When they arrive, he has not returned from his reconnaissance expedition and it is not without a great deal of repetition and a considerable degree of confusion that the Elders eventually learn the true story of events. Here, too, there is an indication of the collective guilt of the Captains, when, in response to the First Captain's words: 'Das war gesagt hier./ Nur wer es sagte - ', the Second Elder says:

Voll verantwortlich
sind alle, wenn auch einer nur gesprochen!
(484)

Amphytrion returns and, having reported the results of his reconnaissance, is astounded to find himself accused of 'gemeine[s] Doppelspiel'. His protests avail him nothing and he is returned to Thebes to stand trial.

The trial takes place in the presence of the citizens of Thebes, and is conducted by the Elders, who function as a council, as the expression 'der Rat der Greise', which appears above and in several other places in the play, indicates.⁸ In this scene,

⁷ Szondi (1973) 183.

⁸ For instance, in Act I, when the Nurse takes it for granted Alkmene will want to be divorced from Amphytrion after his desertion of her, she says: 'Ich werde vor den Rat der Greise treten' (442); and at his trial Amphytrion makes this admission: 'Die Billigung des Rats/ der Greise holt' ich nicht zuvor' (496).

Amphitryon is bewildered, defiant, bitter – and, one cannot help feeling, with justification. The crime of which he is accused – ‘gemeine[s] Doppelspiel’ – he has not committed. He knows it, and the reader (if not the audience⁹) knows it, and one must have some sympathy for the feelings evoked by his humiliating appearance before the people of Thebes, dressed as a goatherd – a creature regarded as ‘weniger als nichts’ (439) – and called on to defend an incomprehensible charge. His anger and frustration are made plain in his first speech, which is preceded by the stage direction *würgend*.

Erwartet Rede ihr von einem Tier?

Mit vollem Ausbruch

Wie ich hier bin - so stellt ein Tier man aus,
das eingefangen in verstiegner Wildnis
- in einer Grube oder Schlinge - nicht
mehr wehrt sich mit dem Ungestüm
der reißenden Natur. Wie bin ich anders
in diesem Ziegenfell und Knotenstab?
Hängt mir noch Schellen um - laßt Flöten pfeifen
und stachelt mir die Ferse mit dem Dorn:
dann dreh' ich mich in täpp'schen Tanz. Das Volk
lief schon herbei zu solchem Jahrmarkt!

(496)

There are actually two charges (509) – first, ‘Doppelspiel’, in returning to Thebes when ostensibly setting out on his reconnaissance expedition, and while there accusing the Captains of offences against him and the state, and, second, aiming thereby to become a dictator in Thebes. The case against him is strong. All those present at the marriage feast can testify to his apparent presence there and to the

⁹ An interesting feature of this scene is that this is the only play in which the audience is not actually told of Zeus's impersonation until the very end. An audience unfamiliar with either the background or the play might well be in nearly as much confusion as Amphitryon at this point – particularly if both roles are played by the same actor, as Kaiser envisaged.

explanation given for his appearance, alone and in the attire of a goatherd; there is the testimony of the Captains as to what actually transpired in the camp (its accuracy admitted by Amphitryon (499)); evidence of premeditation is provided by the mysterious appearance in the tent of the dress and equipment of a goat-herd; and, finally, there is evidence given by Alkmene as to her pregnancy and the occasion of the child's conception and, most damning of all, her report of his jubilant prophecy, when he left next morning, that he would become ruler of Thebes.

Amphitryon defends himself vigorously, asserting his veracity in striking terms:

Die Wahrheit könnt' mit tausendschlünd'gem Rachen
 ein Scheusal sein - ich stieß' in jeden Schlund
 die nackte Faust und zög' sie heil zurück!
 (497)

His demeanour through the trial in fact lends credence to his denials – particularly in the face of Alkmene's evidence, when he is described as '*fassungslos*' and '*wie betäubt*' (507, 508). The feelings evoked by his predicament are similar to those experienced by the King in Langbein's poem, further strengthening the proposition that this was an important source of Kaiser's work. Luthbert is 'wild' as he proclaims to the sentry: 'Ich bin der König, euer Herr', he sees his summons before the false King as 'ein Traum' and later he is described as 'einem Besessenen gleich'.¹⁰

At one point, Amphitryon's bewilderment in the face of the allegation of his

¹⁰ Varnhagen (1882) 98 & 99.

return to Thebes finds expression in a series of questions – ‘Sprach/ ich - aß ich - trank ich?’ (501) – that are a reminder of another disbelieving prisoner in German literature, Kleist’s Prinz Friedrich von Homburg in the play of that name. Like Amphytrion led astray by dreams of glory, the Prince gives voice to his incredulity at the order for his arrest for disobeying orders in the single line: ‘Träum ich? Wach ich? Leb ich? Bin ich bei Sinnen?’¹¹

As with the Prince, Amphytrion’s confidence in himself and in his eventual vindication is nonetheless at first unimpaired. He justifies his fault in not seeking approval for any further warfare on the basis of his renown and the booty that his planned conquest would bring. His words ‘Doch wo/ Ruhm wirkt wird Ordnung weniger geachtet’ (496) have a faint ring of Mercury’s words in the prologue to Molière’s play: ‘Lorsque dans un haut rang on a l’heur de paraître,/ Tout ce qu’on fait est toujours bel et bon ...’ (128-129).¹² He strongly denies his presence in Thebes on the earlier occasion and makes a number of suggestions as to what might have happened, supposing, first, that he has been wrongly identified by some young woman at the trough in the courtyard, or by the goatherds themselves, ‘die immer Fabeln zaubern aus dem Nichts’ (501-502). Then, when told that it is the Elders themselves who testify to his appearance (502), he puts forward a theory that some madness has afflicted the citizens and, finally, comes very close to the truth with his suggestion that the people have been deceived by a swindler (504-505).

¹¹ Kleist I, 629 (765).

¹² Once Fortune has bestowed exalted rank and station,
One may do many things that no one blames.

There is one concrete piece of evidence in his favour but it is discounted by his judges. He has scratched the route of his mountain journey on the pouch of his belt and at the end of his defence he invites the Elders to go over the route with him and let the people he met confirm his presence there.¹³

War' ich in Theben - so ist kein Beweis,
 der fest wie dieser Stab, von euch erbracht.
 Folgt mir in das Gebirge - dort erkennt
 man mich so gleich. Dort war ich und nicht hier!
 (505)

Had this been done – had the journey been retraced following the markings on his belt and his story of his pretended search for lost goats confirmed (as it almost certainly would have been) by the people encountered – this would have provided corroboration of his alibi and would have warranted dismissal of the case against him. However, the invitation is ignored because the Elders, as judges, are neither independent nor impartial. They function as witnesses also, and the principal witnesses at that. When Amphytrion asks for the production of those who claim to have seen him in Thebes, the First Elder tells him: 'Die Zeugen – [...]. Sind wir! - - -' (502). In this capacity, they 'know' that he was in Thebes – they saw him and spoke to him and they could not be mistaken – and they judge him accordingly. Their reaction is an indictment of their performance, no less than an injustice to Amphytrion. It is also an ironic commentary on Amphytrion's own words on his return to camp, when, speaking of the simple peasants he had met, he said:

ich genoß es, wie die Ohren
 und Augen es nur fassen, was sie sehn

¹³ The First Captain's evidence that, on leaving them, Amphytrion went off in the direction of the mountains and that they watched him proceeding that way for a long time is also brushed aside (500).

und hören!

(492)

Amphitryon himself is now the victim of this same trait.

His self-assurance falters when Alkmene makes the announcement of her pregnancy (507-508). No less bewildered than before, he nevertheless has no doubt of his wife's integrity and, once he has grasped exactly what it is she is saying, he accepts the verdict against him and, as directed, makes his prayer to Zeus, albeit 'in unbegriff'ner Schuld' (510). His trust in Alkmene resembles that of Kleist's Amphitryon and is the first evidence of a positive side to his nature, the development of which is foretold in Zeus's later words: 'Die Strafe soll dich läutern' (513).

Alkmene's most damning testimony is contained in the already quoted words that she deposes were uttered by her supposed husband as he left her on the morning following his return – 'Jetzt werd' - - ich Herr in Theben!' (508).¹⁴ These show clearly the tyrannical ambitions lying behind the conduct of which Amphitryon is convicted, as the words of the First Elder recognize, when he condemns 'dies unerhörte frechste Doppelspiel',

das Mißtraun sät - die Zwietracht facht, bis hell
der Bürgerkrieg entbrennt - Thebaner sich
gegen Thebaner wälzen - und der Mord
geht um. Das ist die Stunde der Tyrannen! - -

And later in his speech he proclaims:

Nie werden sich Thebaner so entehren
und bis ins Mark beflecken - duldend den
Tyrannen.

(509)

¹⁴ Jupiter, speaking as Amphitryon, refers to himself as 'Herr in Theben' in Kleist's play (1904).

Accordingly, the sentence of the Elders is effectively one of death, whether immediate or after an interval marked by the misery entailed in loss of citizenship and the withdrawal of all legal protection. The words of the First Elder are uncompromising:

Du sollst, Amphitryon, nicht mehr Thebaner
dich nennen! - - -

[...]

Fliehe vor den Menschen,
die dir begegnen - sei der Zufall so:
man wird dich töten! Wer dich gastfrei aufnimmt,
wird selbst getötet! Tod ist nur noch um dich! ¹⁵

Nach einer Stille

Dein eignes Totenopfer sollst du hier
verrichten. Was der Gott beschließt, verrät
es dir im Rauch. Aufsteigend winkt dir Trost
des raschen Todes. Niedrig schwelend
bleibst du zu langer Daseinsqual verdammt! - -
Steig' zum Altar des Zeus!

(509-510)

The final decision on Amphitryon's fate is thus to be indicated by Zeus and he faces the outcome with courage, praying merely that he should be allowed to die where he stands, or, if death is to be postponed, that his suffering will not be prolonged.

Ist es
die Marter, die mir zugeteilt, so kürz' sie ab.
Ist es der Tod - so lass' mich hier
auf diesen Stufen, die noch Theben sind
und nicht die öde Fremde, gleich verhauchen.

(510)

He has no more to say after Zeus's appearance.

¹⁵ This amounts to a sentence of outlawry, but to what extent there was actually such a Greek penalty is not certain. See S.C.Todd, *The Shape of Athenian Law* (Oxford, 1993) 142, where the author says that what was known as *atimia* in the Athens of the late 5th and 4th centuries involved loss of rights but not of the protection of the law, but that the term may have had a far stronger meaning, including complete loss of legal protection, in the archaic period.

The evidential problem faced by Kaiser's *Amphitryon* is different from that of his predecessors. Kleist illustrates their problem when he puts into the mouth of the First Commander the following words:

Laßt uns in Ruh die Sache untersuchen,
 Und fühlt Ihr wirklich Euch Amphitryon,
 Wie wir in diesem sonderbaren Falle
 Zwar hoffen, aber auch bezweifeln müssen,
 So wird es schwerer Euch, als ihm, nicht werden,
 Uns diesen Umstand gültig zu beweisen.
 (1886-1891)

The fact is that, in the circumstances, it is impossible for either of them to prove that he is *Amphitryon*. *Amphitryon* himself is unable to do so, because Jupiter can duplicate any evidence he brings forward – and does so in Rotrou's play (131-132) and in Dryden's, as previously noted – but even Jupiter cannot go beyond that.

Since until the end there is no evidence of an imposture in Kaiser's play, his *Amphitryon* is not called on to prove his identity, but, instead, to show that the charges brought against him are false – a task that necessitates his establishing the truth of his alibi. At first sight, this suggests that the issue here is something quite different from the issues raised in the earlier plays, whether adultery, identity or their offshoots. In fact, however, what Kaiser has recognized is that there is a more fundamental problem lying at the root of those others, and that is the propensity of human beings to judge by what they see and hear and their consequent failure to acknowledge anything outside their own experience.¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Jetter (1960). Jetter notes the problem 'of man's tendency to believe only that which he can see and hear' in relation to Kleist's play, referring to it as a problem 'that beset him personally' (178).

If we look again at Plautus' play, for instance, we can see that, while Amphitryon may be forgiven for not immediately realizing that his wife has had a visit from Jupiter (though in view of Jupiter's known habits he might well have done so), in the face of Alkmene's firm denials of adultery he should have been more prepared to seek an alternative explanation. Alkmene, too, is adamant she cannot be wrong about Amphitryon's return earlier and therefore she takes it for granted he is lying. She tells him she knows her version of events is true and therefore she cannot believe his story.¹⁷

The same confidence in the accuracy of one's own observation and the same reliance on the correctness of any inference drawn from one's own experience is repeated in the other plays, at least (in the case of Kleist's Alkmene) at first – with unhappy consequences. To Mann, in his discussion of Kleist's play, it is inexcusable that neither Amphitryon nor Alkmene realizes the truth when she is describing 'their' meeting the previous evening. For instance, she recalls his saying that his joy at her welcome was such as to surpass any delight that Hera ever gave Jupiter (819-823); and she also tells him: '... du sagtest scherzend,/ Daß du von meiner Liebe Nektar lebst,/ Du seist ein Gott ...' (958-960). Amphitryon, however, is too concerned about his honour to see.¹⁸

This character trait in humans assumes considerable importance in criminal

¹⁷ *eo fit quia mihi
plurimum credo et scio istaec facta proinde ut proloquor.*
(756-757)

¹⁸ Mann (1928) 587.

proceedings, as Graham's comment on the initial reaction of Kleist's *Amphitryon* indicates. She says:

Yet *Amphitryon* reacts exactly as his servant had reacted: scanning an internal situation as though it were an extraneous event and relying on observation and inference to interpret it for him. Like a criminologist or a judge, he assesses her surprise as 'ein zweideutig Zeichen' ...¹⁹ (emphasis added).

It is this aspect, then, that is the essential feature of the scene in which Kaiser's *Amphitryon* is tried before the citizens of Thebes. In Kaiser's play, however, it is not *Amphitryon* who does the judging – it is he who is judged – and it is a formal affair. The result is affected by serious deficiencies in the actual trial process – the dual role of the Elders as judges and witnesses, as well as the absence of any investigation of *Amphitryon*'s defence, through their failure to follow his invitation to go with him over the route of his reconnaissance expedition. In the end, however, he is convicted because he is judged on the basis of 'observation and inference', and because, human beings being fallible, that is inherently unreliable, no matter how honestly undertaken, and no matter how unavoidable in practice in the administration of the criminal law.

In human terms, then, *Amphitryon* is wrongly convicted. Convincing as the evidence against him appears to be, it is fatally flawed, because an important fact – Zeus's impersonation – is unknown and because of the unreliability of human observation. What in the earlier plays is a matter of individual concern is thus transferred by Kaiser from the private to the public arena; it is moved into the courtroom and the criminal justice system. He has demonstrated that, when one is

¹⁹ Graham (1977) 82f.

accused of a crime, it is not enough to be innocent, nor is it enough that all concerned are telling the truth as they see it. Both of these conditions apply in *Amphitryon*'s case. Of equal, if not greater, importance for an acquittal, however, are a variety of other matters – for instance, the reliability of witnesses in interpreting what they see and hear, the independence of the judiciary, the quality of the defence and, finally, the concern of the prosecution to get at the truth.²⁰

There is more to it than that, however. Since *Amphitryon* is wrongly convicted by the Elders, the sentence passed by them is not legally justified – in everyday terms, it is unjust. However, as will be seen in a later chapter, that sentence is not, in fact, carried out, nor is the offence of which he is convicted the one for which he is in the end punished. More importantly, the offence for which he is actually penalized is not an offence in the eyes of his fellows. At the beginning of his denunciation of humanity's evil ways, Zeus makes plain what in his view is *Amphitryon*'s wrongdoing – his warlike activity against unsuspecting neighbours, exemplified in, first, his unprovoked attack on Pharsala, and its reduction to ashes, and then his preparations for a foray against the peaceful people living beyond the mountains (511). However, the attack on Pharsala had been authorized by the Elders, as the Third Elder establishes in discussion with the Captains (483); and there is no reason to think that, had *Amphitryon* asked for it, approval for his latest plan would have been refused, except on practical grounds.

²⁰ In one other of his plays, Kaiser has shown how misleading apparently decisive evidence can be. In *Die Koralle* (*Werke* 1, 653 (1916/17)), the resemblance between the Billionaire and the Secretary is so close as to deceive all who have dealings with them, so that only the Secretary's wearing of a piece of coral distinguishes him for the two guards in the know. When, eventually, the Billionaire shoots him, he transfers the piece of coral to his own neck. Hence, though justly convicted of the murder, he is condemned under the wrong identity.

Has Amphitryon, then, received ‘justice’? There cannot be a simple answer to that question. We tend to talk as if justice were an absolute, but it is far from it. It is a man-made concept, a matter of subjective interpretation, that will vary from time to time and from place to place and, most importantly in this instance, according to whether one is looking at it from a legal or from a moral point of view.

Amphitryon’s final punishment is for his guilt in the eyes of Zeus – that is, his moral guilt, rather than for anything accepted at the time as legal wrongdoing. This is a very definite pointer to the influence of Kaiser’s own trial in the composition of this scene. As noted in the Introduction, he there acknowledged his criminal behaviour but denied guilt and he made the distinction specific in his justification to the Court, as it was reported in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of 16 February 1921: ‘Gesetzlich halte er seine Handlungen für widerrechtlich, nicht aber unmoralisch’. He also allied himself with Kleist and Büchner, saying:

Was Heinrich von Kleist, Georg Büchner und Georg Kaiser sind, das ist eine Geschlossenheit, die verpflichtet einen durch den andern und auch mich, die Fackel brennend weiterzutragen. [...] Wenn ich den wahnsinnigen Größenwahn habe, die Menschen irgend etwas lehren zu wollen, dann ist es die erste Bedingung, daß ich mich selbst opfere.²¹

The one situation is the reverse of the other, as Kaiser saw them – legal guilt, not moral, in his own case; moral guilt, not legal, in Amphitryon’s. Yet the difference is immaterial to the point he is making here. His defence was his eminent status and

²¹ *Werke* 4, 562, 563.

the importance of his work to his fellows and it was a defence that, like Amphitryon's, the Court was not prepared to countenance. In his eyes, therefore, he was wrongly convicted, as was Amphitryon, since a person of his standing should never have been brought to trial. Hence, from Amphitryon's trial, as ultimately resolved by Zeus, two important considerations emerge. First, it provides strong evidence of the imperfection of human institutions and, second, it embodies Kaiser's view of the overriding importance of the moral perspective in the criminal process.

The conclusion that his own experience of the criminal law had a strong formative influence on this aspect of his play is affirmed by two other plays he wrote in his last years, both of which showed that the events leading to his trial and the trial itself were still very much present to his mind at the end of his life. In the first of these, *Vincent verkauft ein Bild*,²² the main character, an impoverished English artist, succeeds in exchanging for the original a copy he has made of a Van Gogh self-portrait and then selling the original to a gallery in New York for a considerable sum, though his object is achieved only through a succession of lies and ruses. His argument in justification of his action reflects that of his creator at his trial – the overwhelming need of the artist for freedom to continue the creative activity to which he is committed and the message of which is so important to society. The play Kaiser wrote after *Zweimal Amphitryon*, namely, *Pygmalion*,²³ also has a trial scene in which Pygmalion's improbable but true account of the circumstances leading to his

²² *Werke* 6, 165 (1937/38).

²³ *Werke* 6, 515 (Nov. 1943/Feb. 1944).

appearance before the court is greeted with paroxysms of laughter by all present and completely disregarded by the court in pronouncing judgment (589, 590).

Zeus's intervention in Amphitryon's trial has yet to be discussed in detail. First, however, there are aspects of Alkmene's conduct during the proceedings that raise the question whether she should be regarded as a completely blameless character, and that question will now be investigated.

Chapter VI – *The Question of Alkmene's Culpability*

Kaiser's view of his Alkmene is indicated in the passage quoted in the Introduction from a letter to his daughter, which reads:

Vergiss' nicht: die Liebe ist so selten – so ungeheuer selten, dass unter Millionen kaum einer damit rechnen kann ihr zu begegnen. Ich schrieb es jetzt in *Amphitryon* auf und schuf in Alkmene eine seltenste Gestalt.¹

This is underscored by another letter from the same period, in which he said: 'Die Gestalt der Alkmene erscheint mir liebenswert – jedenfalls bedachte ich sie mit allen Zartheiten, die für mich die Liebe umschliesst'.²

Nevertheless it is Alkmene who finally seals *Amphitryon's* fate in his trial before the Elders, by her report of the jubilant words her supposed husband uttered as he left her after their night together. Does her failure to recognize the imposture make her in any degree culpable and, if so, how is this to be reconciled with Kaiser's view of how he had portrayed her? The answer to that question will become clearer if the earlier plays are first examined to see how they have dealt with this question of culpability on Alkmene's part.

Culpability or, the more specific term, guilt is a concept that, like justice, varies with the context in which it is viewed. The ancient Greeks, for example, took an objective view of it – guilt followed the act, regardless of intention. This is illustrated by the story of Oedipus, who unknowingly, but as he was fated to do, killed his father

¹ Letter 1213 (14/11/43).

² Letter 1207 to Frida Haller [Nov. 1943].

and married his mother, and, in Sophocles' version (*Oedipus Rex*), blinded himself on learning the truth. It is also the view seen in Livy's story, already referred to, of the rape of the Roman matron, Lucretia, by the King's son, Sextus Tarquinius. There is an obvious lack of logic in Livy's reported explanation of Lucretia's consequent suicide – that, though blameless, she killed herself so that a woman's unchastity would never be regarded as excusable – and, as will be seen, it has led to various interpretations of the story. However, the attitude on which it is based has been well summed up by a modern writer, who says: '[Lucretia] is made to speak as well as act the absolute, objective quality of chastity [...] Soiled is soiled ...'.³

In Plautus' play, Alkmene is completely exonerated. Jupiter assures Amphitryon at the end that she has done nothing to deserve censure – he himself was entirely to blame⁴ – and he synchronizes the two births so that no one else will suspect her of adultery.⁵

There is a distinct change in the next three plays being considered. Rotrou's *Amphitryon* sets the tone here. In answer to the statement made by the Captain of the Guards that Alkmene's virtue is beyond suspicion, he says that one way or another

³ Joshel (1992) 128.

⁴ ... hau promeruit quam ob rem uitio uorteres;
mea ui subactast facere.
(1142-1143)

⁵ sed Alcumenai huius honoris gratia
pater curauit uno ut fetu fieret,
uno ut labore apsolut aerumnas duas
et ne in suspicione ponatur stupri
et clandestina ut celetur consuetio.
(486-490)

she has erred. Where honour is in question a simple error is a crime and nothing but death can redeem it (139).⁶ His attitude is echoed by Molière's *Amphitryon*. He too makes the claim that in such circumstances simple error is a crime and innocence is lost, and very much the same words are found in Dryden's play, though this time spoken by Alcmene.⁷

In this last play, Alcmene makes the statement following the scene in which she is called on to say which of the two apparent *Amphitryons* is the true one. Her first choice is correct. With the words 'my Heart will guide my Eyes/ To point, and tremble to its proper choice', she unerringly approaches her husband, saying: 'There neither was, nor is, but one *Amphitryon*;/ And I am onely his -' (214). When *Amphitryon* spurns her with the words 'Away, Adultriss!' Jupiter, calling her 'My gentle Love: my Treasure and my Joy', exhorts her to 'Look on thy better Husband, and thy friend,/ Who will not leave thee lyable to scorn' and more to the same effect. She then turns to him, saying: 'I was indeed mistaken; thou art he!', after which she

⁶ Le Capitaine des Gardes:
L'honnêteté d'Alcmène est hors de tout soupçon.
Amphitryon:
Elle a failli pourtant d'une ou d'autre façon.
S'agissant de l'honneur, l'erreur même est un crime,
Rien ne peut que la mort rétablir son estime.

⁷ (Molière)
Ah! sur le fait dont il s'agit,
L'erreur simple devient un crime véritable,
Et, sans consentement, l'innocence y périt.
(1820-1822)

(Dryden)
I know not what to hope, nor what to fear.
A simple Errour, is a real Crime;
And unconsenting Innocence is lost.
(217)

draws a contrast between the deceptive appearance of the man she now calls 'th'Impostour' and the personality and manner of speaking of the being she now accepts as her husband (214). Alkmene may blame herself afterwards, but Amphitryon is in no position to criticize her. Accordingly, when Jupiter finally reveals himself, Mercury reports that both Amphitryon and Alkmene 'stand mute' (217).

A scene in which Alkmene is required to identify her husband also appears in both Falk's and Kleist's plays, but with very differing implications. Falk's scene is short. When Amphitryon is confronted by Jupiter in his likeness, he rushes on the god, calling on him to draw his sword, but Alkmene intervenes. Rejecting a decision based on violence, she says: 'Wer nachgiebt nur, ist mein Gemahl hier - Niemand sonst!' (2836). When Jupiter immediately sheathes his sword she makes the joyful admission that this is what she expected and wanted.

Du bist's! - O, längst hat mir's mein Herz voraus gesagt;
Friedfertiger erschien gleich anfangs mir dein Antlitz:
Du bist Amphitryon, und Jener ein Betrüger!
(2837-2839)

Apart from the general nature of the scene, the reference to her heart's having told her which of the two was Amphitryon and the specific use of the term 'Betrüger' support at least the suspicion of Falk's acquaintance with Dryden's play, unlikely though this may seem.

This scene is assuredly the inspiration for the corresponding scene in Kleist's play that has already been partially described. However the tragic element that will be seen in the later play is missing from the earlier one. There are several reasons for

this, the most important being that there has been no seduction in the earlier play – on any view of the matter, Falk's Alkmene is guiltless. Moreover, she does not compound her error in showing her preference for Jupiter by publicly vilifying her husband. It is significant, too, that in this play it is not Alkmene, but Amphitryon himself, who is responsible for the actual determination, through his lack of response to the test she propounds. Nevertheless, there is an element of unreality in her attitude, if we consider the words spoken by Jupiter on his first appearance in the play, when he indicates that Amphitryon's later suspicions of his wife's fidelity are nothing new. Jupiter says there:

So straf ich, während ich in meiner Brust
Geheimen Wunsch befriedige, zugleich
Auch seine, des Gemahles, Eifersucht,
Die oft Alkmenen unerträglich quält.⁸
(19-22).

Alkmene's conviction that Amphitryon will be the one to withdraw shows that her view of her husband is based on an ideal, rather than on fact, and this is confirmed by her reaction to the result. If she has so often suffered 'unbearably' from Amphitryon's jealousy, her apparent belief that he has suddenly been transformed into this more estimable husband is not very rational.

Kleist, too, shows us an Alkmene who has an idealized view of her husband but, whereas Falk has merely illustrated the possible problem this poses in the circumstances, Kleist has realized the tragic potential for Alkmene's sense of self, for

⁸ The reference to punishing Amphitryon sits oddly with the eventual bonus he receives, in the shape of a splendid estate purchased in his name by Mercury, on Jupiter's instructions (Act V, Scene 15).

her peace of mind, in this issue of identification and recognition of her husband.⁹ The Alkmene he portrays is a woman who quite emphatically sees herself as guilty. Her problem begins when she realizes the initial on the headband Jupiter has given her is a 'J' not an 'A' and, as already noted, her frantic questions to the god are met with equivocal replies. She suspects that she has committed adultery and thinks she must die. If it was not he who gave her the headband, she says (in the words already quoted): '... so sei der Tod mein Los/ Und ewge Nacht begrabe meine Schmach' (1243-1244). She accepts his assurances of her innocence to the extent of referring to herself in the words: 'Ich Schändlich-hintergangene!' (1287) but nevertheless insists that they must part – 'Amphitryon, ich wills, du sollst mich lassen', she says (1321).

To what should we attribute this strange reaction? If she is guiltless why should she have to die? At first sight this is an expression of the purely objective view of guilt, and Wittkowski so defines it. In his words: 'Trotz ihrer subjektiven Schuldlosigkeit betrachtet sie den schändlichen Betrug, mit dem sie hintergangen wurde, als eine objektive Schuld, als eine objektive Befleckung ihrer Ehre und Ehe ...',¹⁰

A more intellectually satisfying explanation would seem to be that this is

⁹ See Lindberger's comment ((1956) 127) in relation to the changed initial, that Kleist's aim 'must have been to let Alkmene experience the problems from which all earlier versions of the subject had spared her' - Rotrou's play excepted. He suggests that Falk's play might have opened Kleist's eyes to the possibility of dramatic conflict inherent in the material.

¹⁰ Wittkowski (1978) 145. A few pages earlier (139) he had said: 'Es läßt sich daher kaum sagen, ob Alkmene mehr den Ehebruch beklagt oder den Umstand, daß ihr ihre Liebe gegen ihr Wissen und Wollen abgelistet wurde. Es geht ihr jedenfalls nicht bloß um das Gesetz der Ehe, sondern zumindest ebenso um Liebe als Gegenstand autonomer Entscheidung, freier Selbstbestimmung'. This is closer to, but not quite the same as, the point made in the text.

were sceptical about her virtue and suggested that she killed herself because she secretly enjoyed the rape.¹² The next century saw the appearance of certain French plays, and in particular Rousseau's unfinished work *La Mort de Lucrèce*, which went so far as to portray Tarquin as a former suitor for whom Lucretia still retained an affection.¹³ A source closer to Kleist is also to be found in earlier German literature, in Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, the heroine of which chooses death rather than risk succumbing to the feelings she fears could be inspired in her by the ruler, her would-be seducer.¹⁴

Essentially the same reaction is to be found in Giraudoux's *Amphitryon*, in an exchange between Alkmene and Jupiter, after her suspicions have been aroused as to the possibility of his having already visited her once. Then, to his query as to whether he attracts her, she answers:

En doutez-vous? Aurais-je à ce point le sentiment de tromper mon mari, avec un dieu qui m'inspirerait de l'aversion? Ce serait pour mon corps une catastrophe, mais je me sentirais fidèle à mon honneur.¹⁵

Whether her response is genuine, or merely a calculated step in her campaign of resistance to the god, it enunciates an attitude that surely owes its inspiration to the earlier French plays noted above.

¹² Donaldson (1982) 36f.

¹³ Donaldson (1982) 84.

¹⁴ *Emilia Galotti* harks back to another Roman story of womanly virtue, the story of Verginia, whose father killed her to save her from the attentions of one of the decemvirs. Livy (1960) 231-236. Emilia reminds her father of this story when he is reluctant to accede to her request to kill her.

¹⁵ Giraudoux I, 164. Translated by Roger Gellert in *Jean Giraudoux, Plays Vol. II*. London, 1967, as 'Can you seriously doubt it? Would I have such a painful sensation of deceiving my husband with a god who repelled me? It might be a disaster for my body, but I should feel my honour untouched' (81).

When Kleist's Alkmene makes her identification of Jupiter as her husband, she is a much-tormented woman. Not only has she been unable to get a straight answer from Jupiter as to whether it was he who was with her the previous night, but she has also had to face his suggestion that her nocturnal visitor was the father of the gods himself (1336). When she upbraids him for attributing such a heinous deed to the gods he rebukes her (1342-1348) and then suggests that Jupiter has perhaps been annoyed with her because she has not appreciated him fully and the purpose of his visit may have been vengeance and punishment (1418-1474). Finally, he presses her to say how she would choose if it were the god who held her in his arms and her husband were to appear (1561-1563). Reluctantly, and somewhat ambiguously, she answers:

Wenn du, der Gott, mich hier umschlungen hieltest
 Und jetzo sich Amphitryon mir zeigte,
 Ja - dann so traurig würd ich sein, und wünschen,
 Daß er der Gott mir wäre, und daß du
 Amphitryon mir bleibst, wie du es bist.
 (1564-1568)

Jupiter's jubilant reaction to this statement – in which he praises Alkmene as one 'So urgemäß, dem göttlichen Gedanken,/ in Form und Maß, und Sait und Klang,/ Wie's meiner Hand Äonen nicht entschlüpfte!' (1571-1573) – makes his identity quite clear, at least to the reader. Yet, even now, Alkmene is not persuaded, as she still addresses him as 'Amphitryon', in what the following exclamation mark indicates are tones of horror (1574).

Her error in the last scene of the play, when she is brought before the citizens of Thebes and then unambiguously identifies Jupiter as her husband (2231), is

compounded when she virulently abuses Amphitryon as her apparent seducer.

Addressing him, she says:

Du Ungeheuer! Mir scheußlicher,
 Als es geschwollen in Morästen nistet!
 Was tat ich dir, daß du mir nahen mußtest,
 Von einer Höllennacht bedeckt,
 Dein Gift mir auf den Fittich hinzugeifern?
 [...]
 Der Sonne heller Lichtglanz war mir nötig,
 Solch einen feilen Bau gemeiner Knechte,
 Vom Prachtwuchs dieser königlichen Glieder,
 Den Farren von dem Hirsch zu unterscheiden?
 [...]
 Geh! Deine schnöde List ist dir geglückt,
 Und meiner Seele Frieden eingeknickt.
 (2240-2244, 2248-2251, 2261-2262)

These words, the first of which are, ironically (as has been pointed out),¹⁶ really applicable to Jupiter himself, show that Alkmene has forgotten how beautiful she had found the impostor when he appeared – more like a portrait of himself, she thought.

Her feelings of guilt are exacerbated at the end, when Jupiter's true identity is revealed, and she realizes the real nature of her misjudgment of her husband. In part this stems from her belief that her own identity has been compromised, because that is what she has seen as the foundation of her initial certainty that she could not have mistaken anyone else for Amphitryon.

Eh will ich irren in mir selbst!
 Eh will ich dieses innerste Gefühl,
 Das ich am Mutterbusen eingesogen,
 Und das mir sagt, daß ich Alkmene bin,
 Für einen Parther oder Perser halten.
 [...]
 Nimm mir
 Das Aug, so hör ich ihn; das Ohr, ich fühl ihn;

¹⁶ Crosby (1974) 112, citing Wittkowski (1969) 42ff.

Mir das Gefühl hinweg, ich atm' ihn noch;
 Nimm Aug und Ohr, Gefühl mir und Geruch,
 Mir alle Sinn und gönne mir das Herz:
 So läßt du mir die Glocke, die ich brauche,
 Aus einer Welt noch find ich ihn heraus.¹⁷
 (1154-1158, 1161-1167)

Yet at the end she has to realize that it is not merely a question of identity. She has to live with the knowledge that she has been betrayed by her feelings into accepting the advances of an impostor in place of the husband she had idolized.¹⁸

Kaiser's Alkmene, like his *Amphitryon*, has to face a different problem from that of any of her predecessors, since no taint of adultery ever attaches to her. It is only with Zeus's appearance that her adulterous relationship becomes evident and in the circumstances of the disclosure it is of no consequence. By the same token, she is not required, as was Kleist's Alkmene, to decide, as between two apparent *Amphitryons*, which of the two is her husband. Yet in the course of the trial she effectively rejects *Amphitryon* as decisively as did her counterpart in Kleist's play.

This Alkmene's concern is with her unborn child and, according to her, she intervenes in the trial solely in order to protect it from the slur of illegitimacy.¹⁹ First,

¹⁷ This passage is to be compared with *Amphitryon*'s claim that eyes, limbs, ears, fingers, even stowed in boxes, should be sufficient to identify a husband (1683-1687). He, too, has had to face an identity crisis (Lindberger (1956) 135f. & Mann (1928) 600): but in the end, with Jupiter's promise of the son he asks for, he is not vanquished by the experience. See Ryan (1969) 103 on the importance of this issue.

¹⁸ Lindberger's comment ((1956) 163) is pertinent: 'Is it reasonable after this to imagine a return to the state which Alkmene indicates in the second act with the words, "Bleibt mir nur alles freundlich wie es war?"'.

¹⁹ As noted earlier, in Plautus' play Jupiter's concern is for Alkmene, rather than the unborn child.

she raises Amphitryon's hopes by declaring how far she would go in supporting him if she could.

Nicht war Amphitryon bei mir, wenn sich
das Licht des Tags auslöschte - er war nicht
bei mir, wenn sich die umgestülpte Fackel
der Nacht zu neuem Brand verkehrt. Nie war
mein Lager von Amphitryon geteilt,
der nach Pharsala zog und von Pharsala
nicht wiederkehrte bis zu dieser Stund',
da ich ihn hier verklagt zuerst erblicke!
(506)

Amphitryon greets this statement joyfully but he is speedily disillusioned. 'So würd' ich sprechen, wenn es mir erlaubt wär', she says (506) and to his query: 'Wer will es dir verbieten?' she answers 'Das Kind' (507). To his further bewildered questioning, she says finally:

So kann ich dich auch nicht verteidigen
wie ich es müßte - lög' ich noch so kühn.
Wie dürft' ich Schande auf des Kindes Ursprung
häufen?
(507)

Amphitryon is described as '*fassungslos*', but she sees his bewilderment as a refusal to acknowledge the child and as a second rejection of herself, and this time she is not prepared to accept it humbly. She says to him:

Wenn du, Amphitryon, aus einem Grunde
der unerklärlich mir, dich mir verleugnest -
stoß' ich mir selbst das Schwert ins Herz und töte
zweimal mit einem Stich: das Kind und mich!
(507)

Her use of the term 'verleugnest', coupled with her thought of death as a consequence, is a reminder of the words of Kleist's Alkmene when she begs Jupiter to say whether it was he who gave her the diadem (1243-1244). There is, however, a

significant difference. In the earlier play it is the gift of the diadem which is in question and the disavowal of which will confirm Alkmene's suspicion that she has committed adultery – a sin for which she sees the appropriate penalty as death. In the later play, it is Amphitryon's apparent wrongdoing in refusing to acknowledge paternity to which the threat of death of mother and child is directed.

No criticism can be brought against Alkmene up to this point. For the sake of the coming child she has to support the accusation of Amphitryon's presence in Thebes on the night in question, but there is not the same justification for her testimony as to his final words as he left her. This is the testimony that discloses his tyrannical ambitions – such an important part of the case against him – and it is testimony that only Alkmene can give. By no means can it be said, however, that the evidence is necessary to protect the child, as is clear from the passage in which it is offered. It should be noted that, in the slightly earlier part of this exchange, the stage instruction for Amphitryon reads: *'wie betäubt'*.

Alkmene:	Heimlich folgtest
	den drei du.
Amphitryon:	Tat ich's heimlich?
Alkmene:	Unverständlich
	blieb mir's. Nur deine Worte hörte ich,
	die jauchzten.
Amphitryon:	Was denn jauchzten sie?
Alkmene:	Jetzt werd' - - ich Herr in Theben!
	(508)

Insofar as it is needed to support her claim that he is the father of her child, Alkmene's evidence is complete when she says: *'Unverständlich/ blieb mir's'*. It is obvious that she has no doubt whatever of the accuracy of her identification of her

husband, but she appears quite unconcerned at the effect of her last words and listens impassively to the First Elder's condemnation of Amphitryon, the sentence of death passed upon him and his prayer to Zeus. (Kaiser gives her nothing to say and adds none of his frequent stage directions indicating a particular emotion). Clearly, she has totally rejected the man she thinks was her husband, despite her experience of love with him, and the motivating attitude is difficult to understand. It is true that she has been hurt by his failure to acknowledge paternity of her child and, presumably, disillusioned by the account of the behaviour of which he is accused and for which he is being sentenced. Nevertheless, her complete unconcern at the actual sentence of death is in sharp contrast with the previously noted response of both Plautus' and Molière's heroines (each of whom has suffered under Amphitryon's accusations of infidelity) to the mere suggestion of her husband's being harmed. She is also quite unlike Falk's heroine, who asks Jupiter to let nothing come between her and her husband, despite the suffering he has caused her. The genesis of her rejection of Amphitryon must be the 'choice' scene in Kleist's play and its two predecessors, but the difference – that here the existence of a second 'Amphitryon' is not yet known – is fundamental. It may be said that Kaiser's Alkmene has chosen her child rather than her husband, but Amphitryon's bewilderment at the disclosure of her pregnancy and his obvious reluctance to suspect her of adultery, still less accuse her of it, suggest that the choice is unnecessary.

From the statements made by Kaiser, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, it seems that what may appear to the reader to be grounds for criticism of Alkmene's behaviour or attitude did not present itself to him in that light, and we must look for

the explanation of this in his idea of the rare love that he said he had exemplified in the play. In his review of the first performance, Diebold made this comment on Alkmene's role:

Und diese auch 'zweimalige' Alkmene - als Bewußte und als Unterbewußte - wird zum Symbol des immer wieder erlebten Wunders: daß jeder Geliebte sich in den Armen der Geliebten zum Gott verwandelt - und daß an jeder Lebenszeugung wahrhaft Liebender das Göttliche beteiligt ist.²⁰

Illuminating as this summing up of the situation is, it does not explain Kaiser's reference to the rarity of the emotion he refers to. Alkmene has given clear evidence in the first Act of her longing for a sexual relationship, but it is obviously not that alone to which Kaiser refers. When Zeus appears to her in the guise of her husband, her attitude is as much one of idolatry, of unreality, as that displayed in her comments about Amphytrion to her nurse and in her prayer to the god. She senses his divinity, but it does not penetrate her consciousness. She has a vision of perfection, a yearning for the ideal, and accordingly she finds her fulfilment in her experience with one who is in fact a god. She tells Zeus, in words already quoted:

Ich spüre
nur das Geheimnis deiner Göttlichkeit,
die Liebe ist.²¹

(477)

And, when Zeus replies: 'Erträgst du Liebe nicht?', her response is to ask: 'Kannst du vom Menschen göttliches verlangen?' (477). With Zeus she is in a state of bliss, of ecstasy, that she refers to (in the words already quoted) as 'das Glück [...], das mich jetzt durchrinnt/ mit heißer Flut und matter Ebbe wie/ das Meer erbebt nicht stärker aus der Tiefe' (466-467).

²⁰ Diebold (1944) 4.

²¹ Jacobi (1952) 101f. notes her resemblance here to Kleist's Alkmene.

We can perhaps reach an understanding of what Kaiser meant in talking of love in relation to this play if we compare the sensation here described with that depicted in some of Kaiser's earlier plays. This sensation, which has been termed 'spiritualized love' and described as 'pure feeling, awakened by attraction to a member of the opposite sex' but 'thereafter able to survive on its own momentum - even, perhaps, into eternity',²² is exalted in an early play written round the love affair between George Sand and Alfred de Musset – *Die Flucht nach Venedig*.²³ Speaking to someone of her night of love with the Italian doctor who has been called in to treat Musset in his apartment, Sand says:

Ich habe genossen, was das Leben lebendig macht: Untergang in Empfindung, die mit *einem* Erlebnis den ganzen Menschen besitzt. Wer zertritt sich diese Fackel, die bis ans Ende der Tage noch Funken stiebt und Licht schickt ins graue Dämmer von Tod?!

(267)

And, despite the fact that her act is a betrayal of Musset, she says to him: 'Ich lebte für dich, als ich diese Nacht erlebte' (270).

In another play, *Oktoberfest*,²⁴ Kaiser depicts a young girl, Catherine,²⁵ who is pregnant and has deluded herself into thinking she is married to an officer who was close to her on three separate occasions on the same day. On the night of that day, the

²² Reichert (1964) 102. Reichert adds: 'Such pure feeling was the highest possession of man to be cherished and protected at all costs'. He attributes the idea to Nietzschean influence.

²³ *Werke* 2, 231 (1922).

²⁴ *Werke* 2, 599 (1927).

²⁵ Lindberger ((1956) 221) notes an affinity between Catherine and Alkmene.

local butcher's boy had sneaked through a window of her house in order to visit his fiancée, a servant in the household, and Catherine had drawn him into her room in the belief that this was her 'husband'. She refuses to disclose the name of her lover but lets it slip when she is in labour. Confronted by Catherine's uncle, the officer she names (who had been in the locality only on the one day) at first denies all knowledge of Catherine but then falls in love with her and comes to accept their relationship as she perceives it to be. The uncle defines the situation in this way:

Ich möchte das, was Sie und Catherine verbunden hat, eine mystische Union nennen. Himmlischen Ursprungs gewiß. Doppelt schwer also: sie auf dem Boden der Realität zu installieren.

(635)

In order to disavow the child's true paternity and reject the reality of the situation, the officer tears up the cheque with which Catherine's uncle had agreed to buy the butcher's boy's silence and, when the latter subsequently demands Catherine herself, kills him.

As indicated by the murder, this sort of love in Kaiser's plays can have a very dark side, in the selfishness and ruthlessness of which some of these lovers are capable in their determination to keep inviolate what is to them the essence of their relationship – their 'mystische Union', as Catherine's uncle terms it.. Nowhere is this ruthlessness more vividly depicted than in another play, *Rosamunde Floris*,²⁶ in which the heroine murders three people, including her own baby son, in order to preserve the secret of her relationship with a young man with whom she had an intense three-week love affair, their only contact now being through the messages

²⁶ *Werke* 3, 363 (1936/37).

they each address to the moon on its path through the heavens. At the end she makes what she considers atonement for her crimes, by not only admitting her responsibility for the deaths she has caused but also taking on herself the blame for a further death for which she was only indirectly responsible. She faces execution rejoicing that nothing can now violate the eternal love embodied in her mystic union with the young man.²⁷

It is the sort of emotion displayed by these characters – a state of all-encompassing, lasting bliss that transcends reality – that is to be seen in Kaiser's Alkmene in her relations with Zeus, and that must be accepted as the motivating factor in her apparent unconcern as to Amphytrion's fate. When Zeus's impersonation is disclosed, her feelings are translated into a mood of exultation occasioned by the revelation of her future importance as the mother of the demi-god Herakles.

²⁷ Reichert's comment ((1964) 105), that 'Rosamunde is no monster', is very difficult to accept.

Chapter VII – *Zeus as Judge*

The effect of Zeus's appearance at the end of Amphitryon's trial is to destroy the evidence on which the latter's conviction and sentence were based and to open the way for Zeus himself to pass judgment on him for a different crime. The long speech that Zeus makes on his appearance falls naturally into two parts – his denunciation of the people for their warlike behaviour, and the announcement of the coming birth of Herakles. The former, which is the subject of this chapter, raises two questions – first, Zeus's fitness to act as judge, both as to the people generally and in Amphitryon's cause in particular, and, second, the extent to which the god's approach represents Kaiser's own attitude to war.

Although Zeus is still in goatherd attire when he appears in answer to the sacrifice that Amphitryon has been directed to make to him, he does not (as, for example, Kleist's Jupiter does) prolong the confusion caused by the sight of two apparently identical characters, but immediately proclaims his own identity, beginning with the following words:

Ich habe deinem Opfer mich gestellt,
 Amphitryon - und nicht den Blitz geschleudert,
 der Theben brennen läßt wie sich Pharsala
 durch dich in Schutt und Ruß verwandeln mußte!
 (511)

He explains that it was he who was the goatherd in Thebes, while Amphitryon was in the mountains, furthering his plans for continued fighting; and he then launches into a violent condemnation of mankind for its murderous proclivities.

Zweimal Amphitryon! - Einmal ein Mensch
 wie ihr - einmal ein Gott wie ich, der euch

so fremd wie lichter Tag von schwarzer Nacht
 geschieden. Sucht der Gott euch noch im Finstern?
 Ihr habt es dichter als ein Schleiertuch
 von Nebeln über allen Ozeanen
 um euch gehüllt - erstickend Flamm' und Funken
 des innern Feuers - einst euch zur Erleuchtung
 des Wegs geliehn, der göttlich euch gewiesen!- -
 Ihr seid nicht weit auf diesem Weg gegangen.

[...]

Ihr habt den Tod geschändet durch den Mord,
 den ihr mit schaler Heuchelei umlügt
 in Krieg der Männer – männerwürd'ges Tun.
 Es ekelt einen Gott es zu vernehmen -
 blutrünstiges Geschwätz von Schlacht und Sieg,
 da Menschen über Menschen triumphieren,
 die den zerfetzten Leib am Boden schleifen!- -

(511)

He then tells the assembled throng, in words quoted earlier, that the gods had decided to destroy mankind – 'Verlorenes Geschlecht - verräterische Art/ geschaffner Wesen. Eure Zeit war um.' (511-512). He himself was ready to loose a thunderbolt, when Alkmene's prayer reached him from earth, and stayed his hand.

Then, having set out what, in his eyes, is Amphitryon's offence, Zeus tells him he has to work his passage back into society. He commutes the sentence of death imposed by the Elders to one of exile until Alkmene's child is born and decrees that in that time Amphitryon is to earn his living as a goatherd among strangers. The edict continues:

und dulde grobes Wort und groben Stoß,
 wie du sie vorher wütend ausgeteilt.
 Die Strafe soll dich läutern.

(513)

Amphitryon is directed to return to Thebes after that time and to care for the child until the latter is old enough to carry out his allotted tasks, which, as will be seen in

the next chapter, include the diversion of the people's warlike tendencies into peaceful outlets.

Zeus's role as a judgmental god is thus clearly established and it stems from three different sources – the Old Testament, Greek mythology and the alternative literary tradition to which Langbein's poem belongs. It is obvious, as has been pointed out by various writers, that the god's proposal to destroy mankind is an echo of the biblical God's decision to overwhelm the earth with the Flood. In Genesis 6: 5-7, we read:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.
And the Lord said, I will destroy men whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

There is, however, an important difference. Because Noah 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord' (Genesis 6: 8), God warned him of the impending disaster and instructed him what to do to save himself and his family, along with one pair of all living things, from destruction. In the play, by contrast, the Olympian god's decision admitted of no exceptions, as a look at the actual words of Zeus, earlier quoted, makes clear:

Ich selbst [...] erbot mich mit der Blitze
entladner Kraft euch zu vernichten: so
daß nicht der Schatten eines Menschen noch
der Erde breite Fläche schreitend schwärzte! - -

(512)

As already seen, this plan was temporarily shelved when Zeus heard Alkmene's

prayer and, in the end, because of Zeus's delight in his experience of her, it was aborted in its entirety.

The mythological source for Kaiser's version is to be found in the story of the Greek 'Noah', Deucalion, and his wife, Pyrrha. As the story is told by Ovid,¹ Jupiter came down to earth in the form of a man, to test the truth of reports that had reached him of the wickedness of the human race. Finding conditions worse even than the reports indicated, he decided on the extinction of mankind. When all but Deucalion and his wife had perished in the flood he called up, Jupiter took note of their piety and goodness and gave the orders that caused the flood waters to recede. The surviving pair then made themselves responsible for a new race of men and women in accordance with instructions given them by the goddess, Themis. Here, too, we have the detail of Jupiter's descent to earth, but the decision to destroy mankind comes after, not before, that occurs and the reprieve affects only the few, not everybody as in Kaiser's play.

It should be noted that Deucalion was the son of Prometheus, whose restoration of fire to man after Zeus had taken it away is perhaps hinted at in the lines beginning 'erstickend Flamm' und Funken', quoted above, though the main reference is plainly to the inner spirit of man.

On a personal basis, the punitive nature of the god is very evident in the alternative literary tradition, in his swift reaction to, and stern punishment of, the

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. I, 211-421.

ruler's sin, whether it be presumption as in Jovinianus' case or, as in Luthbert's case, tyranny and blood-lust. The influence of this tradition is most marked in the sentence Zeus imposes on Amphitryon. Although the penalty of death (immediate or prolonged) imposed by the Elders has been remitted, the punishment is severe, nonetheless. Zeus has tempered his wrath but the wrath is still evident. In one commentary on the play, Zeus has been compared to the Christian God, imposing 'penitential service upon the sinning hero'.² However, Zeus's decree amounts to more in total than merely an opportunity for repentance, though his confidence that that will occur is made clear by his use of the term 'läutern' in prescribing sentence and, perhaps more so, by his decision to entrust to Amphitryon the care of his own son when born. It is noticeable, however, that what is to accomplish the change is actually described as punishment – 'Die Strafe soll dich läutern'. Not only is Amphitryon condemned to the life of a goatherd, even though only temporarily, but he has already suffered what is in essence itself a heavy penalty for a man in his position – the loss of his high command and the humiliation and disgrace of his public trial. He himself refers to this when, at the beginning of his trial, in a passage quoted in full in an earlier chapter, he compares himself, 'in diesem Ziegenfell und Knotenstab', to an animal,

das eingefangen in verstiegner Wildnis
 - in einer Grube oder Schlinge - nicht
 mehr wehrt sich mit dem Ungestüm
 der reißenden Natur.

(496)

² Passage & Mantinband (1974) 292.

The actual penalty imposed by Zeus is very much in the spirit of the alternative literary tradition. The goatherd attire that Amphitryon will retain during his exile is the equivalent of, for example, the beggar's garb of Langbein's king or that of the Court Jester, complete with cap, bells and accompanying ape, that was foisted on Longfellow's ruler;³ and the 'grobes Wort und groben Stoß' that Zeus says Amphitryon must suffer match the scorn and ill-treatment meted out to the dispossessed characters of earlier works in this tradition. It is therefore significant that the god in these works is one who, despite his kinship with the biblical God in Christian versions, bears the responsibility for the wrongs involved in the impersonation of the sinful ruler, the adultery of his wife (one must assume this, since she has no suspicion of the exchange),⁴ the deception of members of the court and the lies that the double has to tell.

With this as a model, the question of Zeus's fitness to act as judge in the light of his own transgressions resolves itself into a question of whether Kaiser had any reason to depart from his sources in that respect rather than whether he had a specific purpose (such as to raise doubts about what appears as optimism in the ending) in retaining the apparent inconsistency in the role of the god. The answer must be seen to lie in Kaiser's attitude to his own transgressions. He claimed that, as he was an

³ In the work of one of Langbein's immediate predecessors, Abraham a Santa Clara, the clothing left for the king was actually a herdsman's jacket (Varnhagen (1882) 95) and some of the earliest rulers were left naked after their own clothes had been assumed by the impersonator.

⁴ One of the few specific references to her in this connection appears in an account of a reworking of Reimundus' work, in which it was said: 'Der englische Kaiser [...] fragt erstlich die Kaiserin: Ob sie diesen Menschen vor ihren Kaiser erkenne? Diese gibt zur Antwort: Gott wolle nicht verhängen, daß ich einen andern, als Ihr Geliebten, vor meinen Kaiser erkennen solle ...' (92).

artist, he was a superior being and therefore should not be judged in the same way as ordinary people. On that basis, he would see nothing incongruous or open to criticism in the portrayal of a god who, though himself guilty of wrongful behaviour, is prepared to assume the role of a judge towards mankind. The god's divinity would put him outside the rules applicable to ordinary mortals.

In relation to the second question that the first part of Zeus's speech raises, two commentators – Diebold in his review of the first performance and Huder in one of his articles – have made the point that, in Zeus's condemnation of war in *Zweimal Amphytryon*, it is Kaiser himself speaking. Huder has this to say:

Und da, wie es scheint, die Blindheit des Menschen es so will, hüllt sich der Dichter selbst in die Maske des antiken Gottes, um den Fluch über den Krieg zu sprechen.⁵

And Diebold's comment reads:

Und wenn in der Schlußapotheose Zeus zum bekennenden Pazifisten wird, so will das zwar zu seinen üblichen Emblemen von Donner und Blitz nicht ohne weiteres passen – denn hier spricht Georg Kaiser ganz persönlich als Zeitgenosse eines grauenhaften Krieges. Aber das Schwert ist ja in des Richters Hand ein anderes Zeichen als in der Faust des mörderischen Schlachtenhelden.⁶

Given that it is Kaiser's voice we are hearing in Zeus's speech, we have to consider whether this final scene fully represents the author's approach to war, as it

⁵ Huder (1961) 614.

⁶ Diebold (1944) 4. This apparently toned down an earlier comment of Diebold's on the ending, which had aroused Kaiser's ire. He wrote in a letter to Julius Marx, nearly two months prior to the publication of the review:

Diebolds Einwand gegen den Schluss des 'Amphytryon' ist so unsinnig, dass ich ihm einen fast groben Brief schrieb. Den Gott zum Verkünder eines besseren Menschentums zu machen, ist so selbstverständlich, dass man in einem Schrank leben muss, um nicht meine frische Luft zu atmen. [...] Aber ich glaube, er besann sich. (Letter 1274 [4/3/44]).

may be gleaned from his comments as well as from the various works written in his later years. Related to this is a further question posed by the criticism that has been made of *Zweimal Amphitryon* by a commentator concerned about what he sees as Kaiser's lack of aesthetic objectivity. Comparing the play with Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, he notes that Euripides composed that play 'in the midst of a war no less dismal to *him*, composed it with righteous anger - and contented himself with objective portrayal of human miseries afflicting victor and vanquished alike, while over all the actors streamed the flame and smoke of burning Troy'.⁷ Is this criticism justified?

To answer these two questions it is necessary to consider in some detail a number of other works relating to the theme of warfare, all written in the last quarter of Kaiser's life.

In 1928 he completed a strong anti-war play, *Die Lederköpfe*⁸, which has links with *Zweimal Amphitryon*, not least in its demonstration of the close association between war and tyranny, or what inspires and feeds tyranny, the allure of power. In this chilling play, which Kaiser said originated in a story told by Herodotus,⁹ he portrays a ruler (called 'Der Basileus') who has no concern for anyone or anything

⁷ Passage & Mantinband (1974) 293.

⁸ *Werke* 3, 9 (1927/28).

⁹ The title-page bears the words 'Grundlinien der Fabel bei Herodot'. There is a reminder, also, of the story of the capture of Troy, as recorded in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the part played by the Greek, Sinon, who, deliberately remaining at large in the city when the Greek ships sailed away, persuaded the Trojans who found him that he was a deserter, and so was able later to free the men encased in the wooden horse (*Aeneid* II, 57-194, 254-259).

except himself and his power. Whether it be his daughter whose feelings he disregards, his exhausted and suffering forces, the troops who mutiny out of despair or the enemy who dare to defy him, he spares no thought for either their lives or their dignity – they have no meaning except as objects of his will, creatures to be trampled on as it suits him.

In the course of a lengthy siege of a neighbouring city, he offers immediate promotion and the hand of his daughter to any soldier who will by any means encompass for him the defeat of the enemy. Tempted by the offer, one of his men horribly mutilates his own face, then goes to the enemy claiming that he has been tortured on orders of the Basileus and offering them his services. Once he has made himself familiar with the city's defences, he gives a pre-arranged signal and at night opens the city's gates to the besieging forces. He receives his promotion in the field and the troops return to the palace, where the daughter is informed of her fate. She does not see the mutilated man's face as he wears a hood over it, but she expresses no qualms about marrying him so long as she thinks the wounds were received in battle. However, she recoils with horror when she learns how, and on what inducement, they were inflicted, especially as the soldier admits that his ultimate object is, through her, to inherit the kingdom of the Basileus. She is able to persuade him of the enormity of what he has done, worthy only of an animal, and together, during the wedding feast, they engineer an uprising of the troops and the people, and the consequent murder of the Basileus. In the process the soldier sacrifices his life, meeting his death at the hands of the Basileus in the crucifixion position – *'die Arme weit ausbreitend'* (56).

There are several particular features in this play that are recalled by *Zweimal Amphitryon*. There is some resemblance between the character of Amphitryon and that of the cruel and despotic Basileus¹⁰ and the two plays have in common the taking of a long besieged city by a trick. Further, Amphitryon's desertion of Alkmene after their wedding reflects the apparent situation in the earlier play, when the soldier leaves the wedding feast to summon the insurgents. The Basileus, who thinks he has gone to mutilate the troops as instructed, taunts his daughter in the following words, which might have been written with Amphitryon in mind:

Für mich hat sich der Feldhauptmann entschieden. Da erlebst du es. Er läßt dich am Tisch sitzen. [...] Hast du verstanden, wie er dich belehrt? Er läßt dich an deinem Hochzeitstisch allein. Es ist nicht mehr wichtig, was sich bei seiner Hochzeitsfeier zuträgt.

(53)

In this play war is clearly exposed as an evil and it is an evil for which one person is responsible, the Basileus. His death at the end is seen as fitting retribution for all the misery he has caused. The soldier's death, on the other hand – freely offered as it is – appears rather as a matter of atonement, prompted by his realization of the sinfulness of his ambitious support of his ruler.

This play was followed by a short piece Kaiser wrote in 1929 for the playbill of a special performance of R. C. Sheriff's *Journey's End* for the benefit of the war blind.¹¹ It was inspired by the Kellogg-Briand pact (the Pact of Paris, 1928) under which the more than sixty states who subscribed to it (including all the Great Powers)

¹⁰ This is referred to by Kenworthy (1957) 172.

¹¹ Schürer (1971) 159 and Kenworthy (1957) 77.

agreed to renounce war as an instrument of national policy and to settle all international disputes by peaceful means. In this work – *Ächtung des Kriegers* –¹² Kaiser depicts a discussion between a Spartan with the significant name of Kellogos and the Athenian Sokrates. Sokrates criticizes an agreement just signed in Athens – an agreement outlawing war that Kellogos was the author of. He entirely supports its objective, but criticizes it for leaving out one letter, the letter ‘r’. Asked to explain himself, he says: ‘Wie könnt ihr eine Sache ächten, wenn ihr die Träger dieser Sache mit Ehren überhäuft?’ (192). It should be noted that, in Sokrates’ amplification of his objection, Kaiser employs the abstract term ‘Krieg’, which wants two letters to be transformed into ‘Krieger’, but he is more probably thinking of actual wars (‘Kriege’). Sokrates makes his point in the following words:

Du hast mit deiner Ächtung des Krieges eine mächtige Lawine ins Rollen gebracht, aber auf halber Halde stockt der Ablauf. Durch deine Schuld. Du hast das R vergessen, das alles reinigt. Dein Krieger bleibt ein Ehrenmann - doch der Krieg ist Verbrechen. So nenne deine Ehrenmänner auch Verbrecher. Verscheuche sie von den Plätzen - führe wie lichtscheues Gesindel sie durch Nebenstraßen im Morgengrauen, bevor das gute Volk zur Arbeit aufsteht. Lass’ sie in Lumpen laufen - mit schwarzen Pestmarken - ein Abscheu für Kinder schon: rennt weg - ein Krieger! Schafft das: dann ist geächtet, was geächtet werden muß - der Krieg im Krieger.
(192)

The moral of the work is clear: ‘Solange es Armeen gibt, wird es Kriege geben’, as Marx records Kaiser saying to him in 1941.¹³ Yet the elimination of armies

¹² *Werke* 3, 187 (1929).

¹³ Marx (1970) 89 (17/3/41). The statement is preceded by another interesting observation that Marx records his friend as making:

Wer Offizier wird, verschreibt sich dem Nationalismus und damit dem Verbrechen. Ich habe deshalb meinen Söhnen, die in Deutschland zum Wehrdienst gezwungen wurden, verboten, sich befördern zu lassen. Den Krieg zu ächten, ist eine Scharlatanerie. Den Krieger, den Soldaten gilt es zu ächten.

does not depend on one thing alone. The soldier reflects the general attitude in the community and that in turn is fostered by the views of those in authority. The importance of their role in the continued existence of armies was demonstrated in another of Kaiser's plays with links to *Zweimal Amphitryon*, *Der Soldat Tanaka*,¹⁴ written in the early war years. The play reflects Kaiser's esteem for Büchner, as he said of the work: 'Es ist vollendeter Woyzeck - es ist mehr als Woyzeck'.¹⁵ It is concerned specifically with the tyranny of the military machine, regardless of its deployment in actual warfare, but it also illustrates that reverence for the soldier that Kaiser attacked in *Ächtung des Kriegers*. It was completed in 1940 and was first performed in Zürich on 2 November of that year, but was taken off the stage after one performance at the behest of the Japanese Ambassador. In a letter to a friend Kaiser has this to say of the play:

Der Soldat Tanaka erhebt eine Fackel der Anklage - wogegen? Gegen alles, was heute geschieht - was gegenwärtig bewundert und verzärtelt wird. Gegen die uniformierte Feigheit - gegen den Absturz in die Soldaterei. Dies ist der erste Grad menschlicher Entwürdigung.¹⁶

The story revolves round a young soldier, Private Tanaka, the son of rice-farmers whose precarious existence has been threatened by storms and bad harvests. At the beginning, Tanaka and a friend make a short visit to his parents, in part with the hope of arranging a marriage between the friend and Tanaka's sister, Yoshiko. However, she is not at home and the parents say she has gone to work for a farmer

¹⁴ *Werke* 3, 705 (1939/40).

¹⁵ Letter 608 to Caesar von Arx [9/12/39]. See Loram (1956-1957) for a discussion on exactly what Kaiser meant by this statement. See also Koepke (1980) 212-214.

¹⁶ Letter 608 to Caesar von Arx [9/12/39].

some distance away. The two soldiers have saved dried fish and poor wine from their rations so as not to deprive the parents, but find to their surprise that the parents have somehow managed to provide a feast for them – fresh fish, good wine, plenty of rice and cigarettes. The parents claim the money came from a sum saved much earlier for just such an occasion as this. Neighbours come in, and the peasants are united in the deep respect they accord the young soldiers and the reverence with which they view the Emperor, who, according to Tanaka, provides everything in the way of uniforms and food for them and would rather himself go without than see anyone in the army hungry or thirsty.

In Act II Tanaka and five friends visit a brothel in the daytime, when the girls are sleeping, but they are awakened because the men are soldiers. Each of the others is provided with a partner, but when Tanaka's turn comes he finds the girl is his sister, sold into the brothel to provide the parents with money to meet interest payments. It is this money that has paid for the feast provided by the parents. A non-commissioned officer comes to the door and demands precedence over the private, Tanaka, who then kills his sister and, after her, the officer.

Act III takes place in Court, in a scene described by Walther Huder as 'ein Meisterstück kriminalistischer Dramatik'.¹⁷ The trial scene is indeed very effective, as the President endeavours to obtain an explanation from Tanaka of his behaviour. Tanaka responds only intermittently and reluctantly to the questions put to him, but,

¹⁷ Huder (1961) 608.

when the President finally realizes that the explanation lies somewhere in the home background and proposes to adjourn the case while enquiries are made, Tanaka admits his relationship with the dead girl and talks of his family situation. He is told that, in the circumstances, the case in respect of his sister will not be pursued further, but his other offence is the most serious a soldier can commit – the murder of a superior – and only the Emperor's pardon can save him from the death penalty. He refuses to apologize to the Emperor in order to obtain the pardon, saying that, instead, the Emperor should be apologizing to him. In a long speech, he pictures this happening – the army drawn up on the parade-ground, himself being called out by the Emperor and the latter's admission that it is not he, but the people, who are responsible for the upkeep of the army, even though in their poverty they have to sell their daughters in order to keep up their interest payments. 'Es ist unentschuldigbar', he says in Tanaka's imagined scene: 'Ich müßte mich aus dem Sattel schwingen und vor dir niederwerfen und den Staub küssen dort, wo du standst' (767). And, a little later, 'Tanaka - ich flehe dich um Verzeihung an'. If that happens, says Tanaka, he will forgive the Emperor. He is taken out and shot.

Here, too, we see depicted the militaristic mentality and the undue regard for the military life that is portrayed in *Zweimal Amphitryon* in Amphitryon's glorification of the life of an officer. His words on that occasion have already been quoted. 'Hauptleute seid ihr von Beruf', he says at the beginning of his eulogy and adds: 'Es kann/ sich keiner ihm vergleichen' (456); and at the end he proclaims that '... jeder Tag, an dem nicht Waffen klirren,/ ist für Hauptleute ungelebte Zeit' (457).

Der Soldat Tanaka obviously goes much further. By contrast with the later play, where the ordinary soldiers are only temporary conscripts,¹⁸ this army is a standing one, and so the veneration of it encompasses the whole army and is evident throughout the population. Tanaka's initial pride in his own occupation is mirrored in the attitude of his family,¹⁹ who consider nothing too good for the soldiers, and of the peasants who come to see the two of them. The status of the military is also well illustrated in the brothel scene, where the girls are awakened because the callers are soldiers, and again at the end of the trial scene, where the court's readiness to forgive Tanaka the murder of his sister will not extend to the murder of the officer (though arising out of the same circumstances) unless Tanaka asks the Emperor's pardon.

A second important aspect in which *Zweimal Amphitryon* reflects the earlier play is in the depiction of the disruption in the lives of the common people that is the result of war or its concomitants. What is several times described in *Zweimal Amphitryon* is, as already noted, the sacrifice made by the men called up for the army, in the interruption to their normal employment, and the effect of this on the community generally. This sacrifice is underlined by the Maidservant, when she talks to the Messenger of her fears that her lover, a master potter, might lose his right hand and with it the possibility of exercising his artistic talents (433-434).

¹⁸ Alkmene graphically describes their summoning on Amphitryon's decision to attack Pharsala:

Lärm
war in den Straßen durch die ganze Nacht
von Rennen Rufen Waffenklirren schon.
Beim Morgengraun war alles wieder still.
(442)

¹⁹ Their attitude is summed up in the grandfather's insistence on bowing first to his grandson, despite the latter's objection that he is the younger, because, says the grandfather, 'Du bist nicht jung und nicht alt - du bist der Soldat Tanaka und der ersten Ehrung würdig' (716).

In *Der Soldat Tanaka* it is the peasants whose suffering is so clearly portrayed, as Yoshiko tells her brother in the brothel of the situation faced by their parents. She relates how the harvest was ruined, first by too much sun and then by a succession of storms. With no rice to sell, the parents were unable to pay interest on the money they had borrowed, '...und wenn sie keine Zinsen zahlen können, verlieren sie die Hütte, in der sie wohnen, und haben nichts mehr - weniger als ein Tier, das seine Höhle hat' (745). She tells him that, when the lender came to collect his interest, father and mother both went down on their knees and begged for mercy, but were told this could not be afforded. The lender had his own commitments – taxes needed above all for the countless soldiers who cost so much to keep.

Yoshiko has no criticism of her parents as she goes on to tell of the escape offered them through her sale into the brothel, but the indication to her brother of the cost to the people of the army of which he had been such a proud member is an agonizing revelation, sparking not only the murders but the strong indictment of the military regime in his final speech. He admits that the newspapers had reported the plight of the farmers, but he had found the story impossible to read at the end, because it was unbearable.

Certain words included by Tanaka in the statement he attributes to the Emperor may be compared with the words used by Zeus in the final scene of *Zweimal Amphitryon*, when he says that he wanted to test Alkmene's statement that she would welcome Amphitryon even as a goatherd – that is, someone 'der nur ein Mensch war

- weiter nichts als Mensch! - ' (512). In saying this, Zeus is applauding the fact that Alkmene's expressed desire is for Amphitryon the man, not Amphitryon the acclaimed commander, but his words also carry the implication that human worth is not enhanced by any external trappings such as fame or position in society or manner of dress. Nor does it need any such enhancement. It is an intrinsic quality, that carries within itself the capacity for nobility, for excellence. Similarly, in the words that Tanaka envisages the Emperor saying to him: '... du bist der erste, der mehr ist als alle andern - ein Mensch. Ein Kaiser ich nur' (767), there is a statement about the value and importance to be attached to human beings as such and a declaration that the qualities Tanaka has shown in his concern for his fellows and his rejection of the military ethos are sufficient to elevate him above even the person who occupies the highest position in the land – the Emperor himself.²⁰

Two plays written by Kaiser towards the end of his life indicate a keen interest in the figure of Napoleon, though it is not the powerful leader of a victorious army that he writes about, but the defeated general driven to abdicate by the forces ranged against him.²¹

In the later work, *Napoleon in New Orleans*,²² which was completed in 1941,

²⁰ Tanaka was, like Alkmene, a character for whom Kaiser expressed great affection. In a letter to Julius Marx (Letter 684 - [6/6/40]) he wrote: 'Ich liebe diesen Soldaten [Tanaka] wie kaum einen andern Menschen in der Welt.'

²¹ The first of the plays was *Pferdewechsel* (*Werke* 6, 233 (1938)). It depicts a Napoleon on his way to Elba and broken and disheartened by the treatment he is receiving from his own countrymen on the way. Underlying the story is what Kenworthy describes as 'an intensely personal declaration - the record of Georg Kaiser's own struggle against capitulation to nihilism' - Kenworthy (1957) 137.

²² *Werke* 3, 563 (1937/41).

Napoleon does not actually appear, but gives his name to the play because of its origin in a legend (noted after the title)²³ concerning his final confinement on the island of St. Helena. The play is the story of an American of French extraction, Baron Dergan, whose worship of Napoleon has allowed him to be duped by one of a band of swindlers into believing that all the articles he has from time to time received from that man are genuine Napoleonic relics. When he is brought an overall alleged to have been worn by Napoleon on St. Helena, and to have been presented by him (in response to a request for a personal memento for the collection) to a fake seaman on a boat bringing fruit to the island, Dergan muses that it should be possible to use the same means to smuggle Napoleon himself out of his confinement and leave an impostor in his place. The swindlers proceed to translate the idea into apparent reality, with one of their number, an actor by the name of Youyou, impersonating Napoleon and the others claiming to be his attendants. The Baron and his daughter move out of their opulent quarters into a small building on the property, and the swindlers start to enjoy a life of ease and luxury.

The Baron, however, is not content with housing and maintaining his great hero, but begins to dream of rousing America on his behalf – ‘der neue Erdteil, der aus der Schöpfung auftaucht, um der alten Welt zurückzugeben, was sie einbüßte’ (598). When he has exhausted his funds in supplying money supposedly for the purchase of weapons, he suggests that the time has come to strike. However, the

²³ ‘Es geht die Legende: Napoleon sei von St. Helena entführt und ein anderer habe seinen Platz eingenommen. Die letzten Jahre seines Lebens soll er in Amerika verbracht haben und in der Nähe von New Orleans begraben sein. Sein Grab wird noch gezeigt.’ (565)

quick-witted Youyou realizes that they would then have to flee and that Dergan would not hesitate to alert the police, and he points out that this would leave the defenceless impostor on St. Helena in danger. They can do nothing while he lives. Eventually word comes through that Napoleon has died, but Dergan's daughter Gloria has in the meantime married Youyou; and her pregnancy, the background to which the impostors rightly assume the Baron would not wish disclosed, provides the opportunity for them to callously reveal their deception and make their escape.

Dergan sets fire to his house and he and his daughter perish in the blaze. He has realized too late his folly, his gullibility and, even more, his failure to see where his worship of Napoleon was leading him.

Kaiser labelled this play a 'Tragikomödie' and, for all the humour provided by the actions of the swindlers, it is his portrayal of the fatal consequences of so great a reverence for power on which the impact of the play depends. In a letter to Caesar von Arx, Kaiser referred to Dergan in the following terms: 'Diesen blinden Verehrer des Kriegs und der blutmorastigen Schlachtfelder'.²⁴ His most explicit strictures on the contemporary situation symbolized in the play he puts into the mouth of the intelligent rogue, Youyou. His first charge is directed at Hitler and his followers. In dismissing the suggestion that his impersonation of Napoleon is a piece of great acting, the actor says: 'Das ist eine Rolle, die dem jämmerlichsten Komödianten gelingt', because it is made up of the basest elements in human nature such as treachery, envy, malice and hate, which an emperor awakens.

²⁴ Letter 892 [19/12/41].

Des Imperators Frechheit kennt keine Grenzen. Erhaben ist nur, was seinen gierigen Machtgelüsten dient. Die Macht braucht Mörder, Schurken, Gauner. Sie ist ein Tausendfuß und jeder Fuß ist ein Verbrechen - eins immer schamloser als das andre ausgeführt - bis man die Macht hat. Bis man Imperator ist.

(594)

Later, Youyou makes a telling observation about the people who supply the money to make war possible.

Es ist doch komisch, wie leicht das Geld fließt, wenn es sich um Beschaffung von Waffen handelt. Da gibt es plötzlich keine Knappheit der öffentlichen Mittel mehr - das Geld scheint buchstäblich vom Himmel zu fallen. [...] Wenn dir aber einfallen sollte dasselbe Geld oder nur den nötigen Bruchteil davon für die öffentliche Verteilung von Brot zu fordern, so würde dasselbe Geld sofort von der Bildfläche verschwinden.

(602)²⁵

As in *Zweimal Amphitryon*, where the captains who connive at Amphitryon's aggressive plans are the subject of criticism, this play makes clear the responsibility that rests on those who prop up a tyrant and those who actively support him in his acts of aggression.

When these four plays are considered together, it can be seen that in the main Kaiser saw war less as a tragedy for all concerned than as a barbarity, a crime, and that that is how he chose to portray it in those plays, and in *Zweimal Amphitryon*. This is not to suggest that he was unmindful of the tragedy, which he depicted clearly in *Die Spieldose*,²⁶ another war play finished slightly later than *Zweimal Amphitryon*.

²⁵ Noted by Schürer (1971) 165 and Kenworthy (1957) 139.

²⁶ *Werke* 3, 821 (1943).

In that play, a young French soldier is sent home suffering from complete memory loss, after originally having been mistakenly reported killed in action. Meanwhile his father and his fiancée have married and had a child and they do not enlighten him as to his identity. The shock when he finds out the true situation leads him to murder his father and claim it was an accident. In the end he makes atonement for his horrific crime by taking responsibility for the death of an enemy soldier, which is going to be punished by the death of ten villagers if the culprit is not found. This play, which illustrates the tragedy of young men taught the ease of killing no less than that of the families whose lives are also shattered by warfare, does not contradict the statement that Kaiser's predominant attitude was one of the criminality of war, and in the light of that attitude the criticism of his lack of aesthetic objectivity in *Zweimal Amphitryon* seems misplaced.

What has to be considered now is the extent to which the ending of *Zweimal Amphitryon* is in accord with the views that Kaiser had expressed in his earlier plays. The penalization of Amphitryon certainly accords with the notion of war as criminal – he pays the price of his military operations just as does the Basileus in *Die Lederköpfe*. But why is Amphitryon the only one to be punished? The Captains suffer no loss, whether of their command or otherwise, although Zeus has made it clear, through his inversion of roles at the marriage feast, that he regards them as having a share in their leader's guilt. Their lot contrasts with the fate of the young soldier in *Die Lederköpfe*, and that of the Baron in *Napoleon in New Orleans*, whose deaths are the penalty for their guilt in promoting aggression, even though, being voluntary, these savour less of punishment than of atonement. Again, Tanaka's death in *Der*

Soldat Tanaka is an indictment of the ruler's guilt in continued maintenance of the military machine. Yet, despite the fact that Zeus's denunciation of war in *Zweimal Amphitryon* is addressed to all the citizens of Thebes, he leaves the whole military machine intact and still under the control of the Elders, who authorized the attack on Pharsala and bear the ultimate responsibility for it.

It is not at all clear why Kaiser should have spared everyone except Amphitryon, contrary to his views elsewhere expressed. It is not explained by the promise of hope in the person of Herakles, since his maturity is many years away; and the influence of the alternative literary tradition, where the punishment is that of the ruler alone, because the sin is his alone, seems hardly sufficient justification. It might perhaps be suggested that the real sin for which Amphitryon is penalized is his treatment of Alkmene, but this would run counter to the whole thrust of the god's denunciatory speech.

The punishment of Amphitryon alone, despite Zeus's condemnation of all the people for their sins, and the nature of that punishment, recall the biblical passage in which we read of a goat being made the bearer of the sins of the people of that time. The English word 'scapegoat', which occurs in this passage, was apparently invented by Tyndale (whose translation later became the basis of the King James Version) to express what he believed to be the literal meaning of the corresponding Hebrew word.²⁷ It is thus the equivalent of the German word, 'der Sündenbock'. Leviticus Chapter 16 records how Moses received from the Lord various instructions

²⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed.

concerning his brother Aaron, amongst them a directive that he take two goats, bring them before the tabernacle and then cast lots between them – ‘one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat’ (16:8). The fate of the latter goat is the subject of a further directive.

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:

And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited:
(16: 21,22)

Amphitryon is not, as the goat is, completely innocent. However, in view of the biblical content of the last part of the play, still to be discussed, and the goat motif throughout, the link between the sending of a goat, laden with the sins of man, into the wilderness and Zeus’s sending of Amphitryon, and him alone, into the virtual wilderness of exile among goatherds may be more than coincidental.

Kaiser’s view of war as not simply evil, but criminal and deserving of punishment, invites consideration of the Nuremberg Trials of War Criminals after the end of World War II. Although he was then no longer alive, he might well have been aware of the indications emerging from 1942 on that they would eventually be opened.²⁸ If that was the case, he would perhaps have envisaged the document that was to emerge in August 1945 as the Charter of the International Tribunal to Try German War Criminals (which defined the crimes to be prosecuted under the three heads of Crimes against Peace, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity) as a step in the direction of turning his view into reality. However, the Charter’s newness and

²⁸ Maser (1979) 17ff. This work contains an extensive bibliography at pp. 335 - 347.

the circumstances in which it was formulated (for instance, its unilateral basis) meant that it was open to, and did provoke, much criticism; and insofar as the criticisms were based on legal grounds they were not conclusively answered on the pragmatic or moral basis advanced by some commentators. There was, for instance, controversy over the issue of the legality of the Tribunal itself and over the question whether, as the defence claimed,²⁹ the specified offences contravened the generally accepted principle that no-one should be punished for a crime not defined as such at the time the act was perpetrated.³⁰

Very apposite to this study, then, is the comment of Judge Donnedieu de Vabres, the French Member of the Tribunal at Nuremberg – as he is quoted by Maser³¹ – when he labelled the sentences imposed on the major war criminals as ‘an expression of human, and therefore relative and fallible justice’, which ‘probably coincided neither with the judgment of history nor with that of God’. As Kaiser shows in *Amphitryon’s* trial by the Elders, justice in a legal forum demands as a prerequisite the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. As an instrument by which crime was defined, and punishment was to be inflicted, from the standpoint of

²⁹ Maser (1979) 260.

³⁰ An interesting twist to the problem of what acts were properly punishable in these proceedings is to be seen in the Tribunal’s refusal to convict Grand Admiral Dönitz on charges relating to his conduct of submarine warfare – despite clear evidence of breaches of international law – in the face of incontrovertible evidence as to similar practices on the part of both British and American Navies. Maser (1979) 153-159. See also the comments of Rebecca West in *A Train of Powder* (London, 1984) 52-53.

³¹ Maser (1979) 283. The comment did not preclude a conclusion that it was better to have ‘imperfect justice than no justice at all’ – Best (1984) 8.

the victorious nations as self-appointed adjudicators, the 1945 Charter must be seen as falling a long way short of the fulfilment of Kaiser's vision.

Chapter VIII – *The Meaning of the New Testament Parallel*

The second part of Zeus's final speech to the citizens of Thebes consists of his promise to Alkmene concerning the birth of her child, which in form is an explicit parallel between the conception and future role of that child and the conception and intended role of Christ in Christian belief. The question to be considered concerns the nature of the conclusion to which the symbolism in the parallel leads. Is it of purely religious significance, or is there some other interpretation to be placed on the scene? Differing views have been expressed. At the conclusion of his Nachwort to the three plays published under the name *Griechische Dramen*, Caesar von Arx summed up his view in the following words:

Es ist nicht von ungefähr, daß Georg Kaisers letzte Pläne um die Gestalt des göttlichen Erlösers kreisen. Er, der Dichter, der ein Leben lang von der Erneuerung des Menschen träumte, an sie glaubte, sie forderte - er weiß es nun, an der Schwelle des Todes: daß der Mensch sich nicht aus eigener Kraft zu erneuern vermag - daß er einzig und allein durch Gottes Gnade erlöst werden kann.¹

Wittkowski also saw the scene as expressing a religious point of view, but the comment he made in his introduction to his analysis of Kleist's *Amphitryon* suggests a somewhat cursory reaction to what is really a complex issue. In his view, Kaiser 'vergrößerte den Stoff zu einem Anti-Kriegsstück und einer Werbeschrift für Religion'.²

Still a third approach is to be seen in Walther Huder's comment in an article on

¹ *Griechische Dramen*, 381-382.

² Wittkowski (1978) 49.

the religious aspect of some of Kaiser's later writing, in which he observed:

Selbst die 'Hellenische Trilogie' beläßt der göttlichen Erscheinung kaum mehr als das Rollenfach eines Deus ex machina, die dichterische Inkarnation des Erlösers aus tragischer Situation. Gottes-Erscheinung ist bloße dichterische Setzung, Figuration dichterischer Welterlösung und Willenskraft.³

To assess the strength of these statements, it is necessary, first, to examine the scene in some detail and, second, to consider earlier works of Kaiser's, and earlier statements by him, that indicate the nature of his approach to religion.

The scene begins when Alkmene is told:

Du sollst den Göttersohn gebären: Herakles!
Kraft wächst ihm wie noch nie ein Irdischer
erstarkt. Und diese Stärke wird sich nicht
vergeuden.

(512)

This can be compared to the Annunciation of Mary, as recorded in Luke's Gospel.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth.

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

[...]

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest ...

(Luke 1:26-28, 31-32)

Similar claims for a parallel between New Testament and play have been made in respect of Kleist's *Amphitryon*. Both Goethe and Kleist's friend Adam Müller

³ Huder (1957) 295.

claimed that that play deals with the Annunciation, and others have advocated the same view up to the present day.⁴ That the work calls to mind the biblical story must be conceded, but that there is a direct parallel to the Annunciation in the ending seems to be a difficult proposition to sustain. Lindberger,⁵ who quotes both Goethe and Müller on the point, considers it a sufficient refutation of this interpretation to point to the great difference between Kleist's work and Burmeister's *Sacri Mater Virgo*, which was referred to in an earlier chapter, but he also comments, first, that Kleist's Jupiter divulges no plan to have Herakles come into the world and, second, that the latter is mentioned only as a hero and not as the saviour of humanity.⁶

The first of those comments does not seem to be borne out on a close analysis of Kleist's play. In the scene in which Jupiter first tries to calm the distraught Alkmene and then further upsets her by telling her she has received a visit from the father of the gods, his response to her expression of horror includes the following words:

Wenn du Kallisto nicht, die herrliche,
 Europa auch und Leda nicht beneidest,
 Wohlan, ich sags, ich neide Tyndarus,
 Und wünsche Söhne mir, wie Tyndariden.
 (1352-55)

These words certainly indicate that the birth of Herakles is part of his plan even before Amphytrion takes the opportunity presented to him at the end and expresses

⁴ See, for instance, Hölscher (1991). In the course of his discussion, Hölscher analyses the relationship between the New Testament narrative and not only the Greek myth but, further back, ancient Egyptian temple writings recording the visit of the king of the gods, Amun, to the wife of the reigning king in order to father the next king.

⁵ Lindberger (1956) 144-146.

⁶ On the second point, see also Koepke (1980) 215.

the wish for a son like the Tyndarides. However, the fact that the actual promise of such a son is not given until after Amphitryon's express request, coupled with the terms of the promise, suggests a fundamental objection to the proposition that Kleist has reworked the Greek myth in terms of the Annunciation, namely, that the promise of Herakles' birth is made to Amphitryon, not to Alkmene.⁷ 'Dir wird ein Sohn geboren werden' (2335), says Jupiter to him (emphasis added), and Amphitryon presumably realizes that the child will be a foster-son only, as were the Tyndarides – the name meaning the sons of Tyndareus, an earlier victim of Zeus's cuckoldry. Moreover, Amphitryon's request is made in response to Jupiter's invitation to say what he wants if he is not satisfied with the god's thanks and forecast of glory, and that response begins with the unambiguous words: 'Nein, Vater Zeus, zufrieden bin ich nicht!' (2330). Jupiter's reply has all the signs of being a sop to Amphitryon's wounded pride.

In Kaiser's play, by contrast with that of Kleist, Zeus's promise is made to Alkmene, not to Amphitryon, and the words he uses – 'Du sollst den Göttersohn gebären: Herakles!' – emphasize the child's divine parentage. The biblical parallel with Luke 1:35, in which the angel Gabriel tells Mary the child to be born to her will be called 'the Son of God', is underscored a little later, in Zeus's words: 'Schlummert nicht der Sohn/ des Gottes dort ...' (513).

Moreover, Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived and so was this

⁷ On these comments, see Stahl (1961) 60.

Alkmene when Zeus appeared to her. A source for this feature of Kaiser's play can be found in the Greek mythology, but the improbability of the circumstances he has invented to account for it suggests that some other source has had a considerable influence also. That this was the Nativity story becomes apparent when we consider that the exile imposed by Zeus on Amphitryon is to last 'Bis dieser Sohn geboren' (512). Writers have seen in this a reference to the duration of the penalty of dumbness imposed on Zachariah by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:20).⁸ What these writers have overlooked, however, is that, though Joseph lived with Mary after the angel appeared in his dream, according to one of the Gospels he 'knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son' (Matthew 1:25). Mary therefore remained a virgin till the child was born. Alkmene is no longer a virgin after Zeus's visit, but the parallel is there, in that his decree means that she will remain celibate from that time until Amphitryon's return after the child's birth.⁹

It may have been the discussion surrounding Kleist's play that turned Kaiser's mind towards the biblical story, but Burmeister's work would have provided a much more likely link, if Kaiser knew of it, and there must be a suspicion that he in fact did.

Having made his pronouncement about the birth, Zeus goes on to outline what his son will do on earth. He mentions that there will be ten tasks imposed on him – the ten Herculean labours of myth – and then he continues:

⁸ Passage & Mantinband (1974) 292; Buffinga (1986) 487.

⁹ Lach ((1971) 310) is the only person other than the present writer to notice this biblical comparison.

Er wird den Unrat von der Erde wälzen,
 der sich gehäuft. Untiere, die in Sumpf
 und Höhle hausen, würgt er. In der Wiege
 die gift'ge Schlange vor dem Biß. Er bleibt
 verschont von Bosheit. - - -
 Danach ruft er zum Kampf - ruft nach Olympia.
 Es soll die Lust am Kräftespiel nicht weichen.
 Doch Kraft kämpft wider Kraft. Nicht List mit List.
 Der unversehrte Leib sei das Gebot,
 dem sich die neuen Kämpfer willig fügen.
 Denn Kraft soll wachsen und nicht untergehen.
 So sind die Spiele von Olympia
 des Weges neues Spiel! - -
 (512)

Herakles' intended function as the saviour of mankind is clear. Most importantly he is to redirect man's – in the context of the play it is probably correct to say 'men's' – warlike proclivities into acceptable outlets. The reference to the Olympic Games is introduced, no doubt, because of the attribution to Herakles of their founding¹⁰ but the reference to his strangling of the serpents while still in his cradle reads a little oddly. Although this is part of the Herakles mythology, as noted in the chapter on the myth, and also figures in Plautus' play (1118), it requires rather more of a suspension of belief than is necessary for other parts of the story. It is therefore surprising at first sight that Kaiser should have singled it out for mention, but it becomes less so when we remember that, as noted in the earlier chapter, Burmeister in his *Sacri Mater Virgo* saw a connection between this exploit and the words God spoke to the serpent, as recorded in Genesis 3:15.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and

¹⁰ Pindar (1972) 62ff. (*Olympian Ode XI*), referred to in Buffinga (1986) 486.

her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.¹¹

This reference increases the suspicion that Kaiser knew Burmeister's work, but it still falls short of actual proof. Given his obvious acquaintance with the Bible, it is highly likely that Kaiser should make a similar connection between the serpent who, with the assistance of a woman (Eve), thwarts God's purpose for man in the Garden of Eden and the serpents who, at the behest of another woman (Zeus's consort Hera), try to thwart Zeus's purpose in siring the demi-god, Herakles.

Zeus makes his farewell speech to Alkmene in a passage that reveals again his tenderness for her, admixed with thoughts of his son.

Wenn manchmal dich ein Pfeil des schönen Lichts
aus vollem Mittag trifft, so ist er dir
von Zeus gesandt. Füll' dir das Auge mit
dem reinen Schein und lass' bis in den Schoß
den Glanz einfließen. Schlummert nicht der Sohn
des Gottes dort und sucht des Vaters Wesen
im Keim schon? So entfaltet er sich göttlich!- -
(513)

After Zeus has departed as he came, in a column of smoke, Amphytrion sets off into exile without a word and the play concludes with Alkmene's reaction to Zeus's disclosure that he is the father of her child.

Es war der Gott. Nun wird er Mensch. Ich berge
Unsägliches in meinem Schoß. Fall' ich?
Ich steige. Bleiben muß ich. Halt' mich, Amme.
(513)

She falls senseless into the Nurse's arms.

¹¹ At the time the King James Version of the Bible was published in 1611, one of the meanings of the verb 'bruise' was 'break' or 'smash'. See *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*. 1993. Vol.1.

Her statement that she is carrying something 'Unsägliches' in her womb calls to mind the Jewish belief, dating back to early times, as to the sacredness of the divine name and the consequent ban on its utterance.¹² It is admittedly only the name of God Himself to which this refers, but the fact of the Trinity being one in Christian theology makes it applicable to the son of God in this context. Also relevant are the secret cults of Greek religions, the mysteries, of which the most famous were the mysteries of Eleusis. In these cults secrecy 'was radical, though it remained an open question whether in mysteries the sacred was forbidden, *aporrheton*, or unspeakable, *arrheton* in an absolute sense'.¹³

Alkmene's next words – 'Fall' ich? Ich steige' – suggest an uplifted mood, which marks a contrast with Kleist's Alkmene's eventual response to Jupiter/Amphitryon's suggestion that she has been visited by the father of the gods himself:

Was das für unerhörte Reden sind!
 Darf ich auch den Gedanken nur mir gönnen?
 Würd ich vor solchem Glanze nicht versinken?
 Würd ich, wär ers gewesen, noch das Leben
 In diesem warmen Busen freudig fühlen?
 Ich, solcher Gnad Unwürdig'? Ich, Sünderin?
 (1363-1368)

¹² This is discussed fully by Leo Rosten in his book *The Joys of Yiddish*. Penguin Books, 1971. On p.3 he states:

Four Hebrew letters, YHWH, form the Hebrew name for God. ...
 Only in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem was the utterance of YHVA (sic) permitted. And when the awesome appellation was pronounced by the high priest, the musical part of the service swelled up loud so that worshippers would not hear The Name.
 In English, YHWH is rendered vocally as 'Yahweh' or 'Yahveh'.

¹³ Burkert (1985) 276.

Kaiser's Alkmene's lapse into unconsciousness shows that she is overwhelmed by the revelation of her future role, but her joy is unmixed with any feelings of unworthiness, nor does she regard herself as diminished by the knowledge that she is to bear an adulterous child. She obviously sees herself as the Virgin Mary saw herself, blessed among women as the mother-to-be of the future saviour of mankind. This is clearly shown by the statement: 'Ich steige', which immediately follows her query: 'Fall' ich?', the positive statement a reminder of Mary's claim that 'from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed' (Luke 1: 48). It is also a reflection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary's eventual assumption into Heaven. However, Alkmene accepts her basic humanity and the need for her to focus her mind on the needs of the coming child with the words: 'Bleiben muß ich'.

On the face of it, this scene is an affirmation of belief in the existence of God and an acknowledgement of man's need of His assistance in order to achieve redemption – the view of Caesar von Arx and others following him.¹⁴ However, Kaiser's belief in the Christian God is by no means certain.¹⁵ In the first place, comments made in letters round about that time give rise to doubts. In one letter, for instance, Kaiser began a sentence explaining his use of the expression 'Gott segne Sie' with the words: 'Da ich nicht gottgläubig bin, sondern alles dem Menschenwurm

¹⁴ See, for instance, Loram (1957) 30 and Buffinga (1986) 487.

¹⁵ A particular view of God's promise of His son as saviour is seen in the poem Kaiser wrote in November 1944, that was inspired by the fate of the children in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp. The poem, *Der Kindermord*, describes how the mothers of the Innocents in vain beseech God not to send His son to earth, claiming '... er ist das Schwert, das unsre Kinder fällt ...' - Kaiser 4, 702 (8/11/44).

zuschiebe ...';¹⁶ and in a later one he claimed: 'Grundsätzlich: ein anständiger Mensch braucht keine Religion – und bei den anderen ist sie unwirksam'.¹⁷ Further, although he made use of Christian symbolism in a number of his plays, its purpose appears mainly to give added force to the basic theme of the play, so that it is inconclusive in regard to the question of Kaiser's belief or lack of it.

Very commonly, it is Jesus as redeemer through self-sacrifice to which the symbolism relates. This is so, for instance, in *Die Bürger von Calais*,¹⁸ one of Kaiser's early plays in which Christian symbolism is an important element. Kaiser's Expressionist vision of the regeneration of man, which is manifest in *Zweimal Amphitryon* in Zeus's promise of the advent of Herakles and his task of reforming the world, is prominent in this play, which was based very loosely on a well-known incident in the Hundred Years War between England and France, when the English King offered to raise his siege of Calais provided six of its citizens were prepared to surrender to him. In the play, when seven volunteers, led by a leading citizen, Eustache de Saint-Pierre, have come forward, Eustache proposes the drawing of lots to decide which of the seven will be spared. The draw takes place during a shared meal, which Eustache relates to the Last Supper, when he says: 'Wir sitzen um diesen Tisch - wir suchen das gleiche Ziel - der Willen [sic] ist einer - so teilen wir noch die gleiche Speise!' (551).

¹⁶ Letter 1115 to Frida Haller [April 1943].

¹⁷ Letter 1292 to Julius Marx [18/4/44].

¹⁸ *Werke* 1, 519 (1912/13).

The draw is abortive, however, because Eustache, not satisfied of the genuine commitment of all the others, has arranged for the lots to be identical. He then proposes that all seven men should set off from home the next morning at the same time and the last to arrive should be the one to be excluded. After the other six have arrived, Eustache's blind father brings in the body of his son – who has resolved the issue by committing suicide – with the words: 'Meine Augen sind offen - [...] ich habe den neuen Menschen gesehen - in dieser Nacht ist er geboren! - -' (577). This statement is reinforced in the final stage setting, where Kaiser presents a symbol of the Ascension of Christ.

Das Licht flutet auf dem Giebfeld über der Tür: in seinem unteren Teil stellt sich eine Niederlegung das [sic]; der schmale Körper des Gerichteten liegt schlaff auf den Tüchern - sechs stehen gebeugt an seinem Lager. - Der obere Teil zeigt die Erhebung des Getöteten: er steht frei und beschwerdelos in der Luft - die Köpfe von sechs sind mit erstaunter Drehung nach ihm gewendet.
(579)

The symbolism is very explicit, but it has clearly been used to show Eustache as an example of man redeemed, and to give meaning to the play as a statement of Kaiser's Expressionist concern for, and vision of, the regeneration of man.

A letter Kaiser wrote in 1943, in which he claimed to have had some sort of religious experience, might at first sight appear to be evidence for a firm belief in God on his part, but on examination it suggests otherwise. He described the experience in the following way:

Neulich hatte ich bei Celerina eine Begegnung mit dem lieben Gott. Er gab mir einen merkwürdigen Auftrag: ich solle den Menschen mitteilen, dass er garnicht daran denke sich noch weiter mit ihnen zu beschäftigen. Er habe genug damit zu tun die Wunden seines Sohns, die ihm am Kreuz geschlagen, zur Heilung zu bringen.¹⁹

¹⁹ Letter 1105 to Frida Haller [30/3/43].

As a result of this injunction, Kaiser said, he was going to write another work in which God, with Mary and Jesus, is shown awaiting the healing of all Jesus' wounds, which can only occur through the good deeds of men. He waits in vain – there is only one good deed, and that is not enough to cure more than the wound caused by the soldier's spear. God decides to have artificial hands and feet made for His son and after this is done the three of them return to Paradise. Kaiser's attitude to Mary is shown in the following comment in the letter:

Hinreissend ist die Gestalt der Maria, die immer einige Wunder tun will - doch ihr Gatte Gott verbietet es mit dem Hinweis, dass erst ihres Sohnes Wunden heilen sollen.

The inclusion in the plan of a need for good deeds shows the influence of Bertolt Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, of which, as noted in the Introduction, Kaiser had written so enthusiastically to Julius Marx. It is probable also that Kaiser had in mind Gerhart Hauptmann's *Der arme Heinrich* (itself inspired by the Middle High German text of Hartmann von Aue), in which a nobleman is cured of his leprosy through a young girl's love for him, and her willingness to die to save him. However, his plan did not come to fruition.

It is not clear what the 'Begegnung mit dem lieben Gott' referred to in Kaiser's letter was, but perhaps there is a clue in a slightly earlier letter to the same person,²⁰ where he wrote:

Darüber ein Himmel, der ein einziges Wunder ist. Abends sind die Farben wie

²⁰ Letter 1049 [3/12/42].

Gottes Feuerwerk, das er sich zur Freude anzündet. Vielleicht seine einzige Freude - denn an den Menschen findet er sie nicht. Nur an den wenigen, die sein himmlisches Feuerwerk sehen. Nur diese wenigen sind ihm wichtig. Ich weiss es. Gott sprach zu mir in seinen Feuern.

The change from the metaphorical language at the beginning to apparent reality at the finish provides its own comment on this statement, and in conjunction with the pessimism evident in the message Kaiser claimed in the later letter to have been given tends to negate the initial impression given by that letter.

This pessimism is obviously the source of another play with religious connotations that Kaiser completed at about the same time, namely, *Das Floß der Medusa*.²¹ This play was several years in the making and underwent considerable change in the process. Kaiser outlined his original plan, which was suggested by a newspaper report of the torpedoing of a ship carrying children from England to Canada for safety, in a letter to his friend Caesar von Arx in 1940.²² The title was obviously suggested by Théodore Géricault's famous painting 'Raft of the Medusa', which was based on a contemporary shipwreck, but its significance extends beyond that. In a letter apparently written in August 1942, Kaiser referred to a newspaper report that prefaced a statement that he was working on a new play, *Das Floß der Medusa*, with the words 'Zurück zum Mythos', and he noted that this was 'nur zum Teil richtig'.²³ The reference obviously is to the Gorgon Medusa, whose head was so

²¹ *Werke* 3, 769 (1940/43). The play was first performed in Basel on 24/2/45.

²² Letter 707 [28/9/40].

²³ Letter 997 to Alma Staub.

horrific in appearance that it turned to stone anyone who looked on it. However, what Kaiser meant to convey by the name is not certain. It may have been the association with war, since, as was seen earlier, the Gorgoneion, as the head was called, was a popular representation on warriors' shields. Alternatively he may have been pointing to the hard-heartedness of the principal girl (as she appears in the final version) or, again, referring to the use of the Gorgoneion as a protection against the evil eye – ironically indicating the lack of protection for the ship carrying the children.²⁴

In its original conception, the play was to be an exposé of the evils of war and a denunciation of the wickedness of adults in causing it and thus allowing children to be subjected to the horrors of torpedoing and shipwreck. 'Verurteilung der Erwachsenen, die solche Schandtaten vollbringen: Kinder im Boot auf dem Meer treiben lassen' was how Kaiser put it in his letter to his friend. In its final form, in which Christian symbolism makes a marked appearance, it is seen as less an anti-war play than one reflecting Kaiser's own desperation at the current state of the world, as evidenced in letters such as the following:

Zu dicht ist die Finsternis, die uns umgibt - eine schwarze Hölle, in der die Teufel lärmen und lästern. Welches Heiligtum wird nicht betastet - besudelt? Wer bleibt rein vom Unrat der Gegenwart?²⁵

The characters in the play are child survivors of the torpedoing and sinking of the ship carrying them out of the war zone. Twelve are aged between ten and twelve

²⁴ Oxford Classical Dictionary, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1996) 643, under the heading 'Gorgo/Medusa', notes the attributes of Medusa and the Gorgoneion.

²⁵ Letter 994 to Frida Haller [August 1942].

and the thirteenth is a nine-year old, who cannot speak²⁶ and whom they call 'Füchslein' because of his red hair and the rust-coloured jersey he is wearing. The friendly atmosphere at the beginning is threatened when one of the girls, Ann, claims that they will never be saved if they all eat together, because of the danger associated with the number thirteen – the number of those who sat down to the Last Supper. This is dismissed as superstition by the boy leader, Allan, but is obviously taken seriously by the others. Ann suggests that Füchslein must die – he is the Judas among them, since he is useless. He cannot row, cannot count to aid the rowers, cannot do any banging to act as a foghorn. Allan tries to protect the little boy, reminding them all of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' but Ann tricks him and persuades the others to throw the child overboard at night, without Allan's knowledge. When, shortly afterwards, a plane comes to rescue them, she claims that is the reason they have been saved (though the pilot indicates otherwise) but Allan's despair at the callous act finds outlet in his refusal to go with the others. The pilot assumes Füchslein was a dog and cannot understand Allan's attitude. The plane takes off to avoid a following enemy plane, which shortly appears, rakes the boat with machine-gun fire and leaves. In the epilogue Allan is shown lying on the half-submerged boat, 'WIE GEKREUZIGT', and the significance of his tragic death is underscored by the pilot's offhand, cynical attitude, summed up in the word 'Schade' in the following comment (admittedly made without his awareness of the true facts): 'Nach so viel Nöten kann ein Kopf verwirrt sein. Schade, es schien ein guter Kopf zu sein!' (819).

²⁶ The reason for this is not given in the play, but in a letter to the Director, Robert S. Pirk, (Letter 1458 [22/12/44]) Kaiser said that Füchslein is 'ein vom gewaltigen Schreck bis zur Sprachlosigkeit und Hilflosigkeit entsetztes Kind'.

Although Ann insists on the religious connotation of the number thirteen – as when she says: ‘In jedem dreizehnten kehrt Judas wieder und wenn er nicht umkommt - schlägt gleich das Boot um’ (799) – it is clear from the long speech in which she responds to Allan’s reminder about the biblical injunction against killing that she has a very cynical attitude to the Christian religion. In the course of the speech she asserts that what the churches preach is divorced from reality. If it were not, if people’s behaviour corresponded with Church teaching, churches and preachers would be unnecessary. In her view: ‘... das mußt du nur begreifen: Gebote sind für die Sonntagspredigt da, das halt gewaltig in der Kirche - doch draußen ist alles anders ...’ (802).

At the beginning of the play, one of the girls condemns the fearful nature of adults in the following terms:

Es müßte doch in allen Zeitungen der Welt erscheinen, wie Kinder miteinander sind, wenn man sie Kinder sein läßt. Warum sind die Großen so schonungslos in ihrem bösen Tun?!

(779).

But at the end, the words spoken by the pilot to Allan and Allan’s reply give the lie to this criticism.

Pilot: Die Menschen werden einmal besser - und wie die Kinder sein.

Allan: Es werden die Kinder wie die Erwachsenen sein - weil sie als Kinder schon wie Erwachsene sind!

(818)

It is clear that Kaiser’s extreme pessimism at this time over the state of the world is mirrored in Allan’s inability to rise above his despair at Ann’s betrayal and the callousness of all his companions, and Kaiser emphasises this when in more than

one letter he indicates that he identifies with the character. For instance, in a letter written at the time *Das Floß der Medusa* was completed, Kaiser comments: ‘... wenn Sie die Seele des Knaben Allan aufschreien hören, dann denken Sie daran, dass es meine Seele ist und dass ich Allan bin’.²⁷

There are reminders in the play of *Die Bürger von Calais*, but the mood is very different. There is an abortive drawing of lots to decide who is to be denied food so that there will be only twelve eating together, but with an exactly opposite result aimed at. In the earlier play, the chosen one would have been among the sacrificed; in

unjustly reviled and despised and accordingly marked out for extermination.²⁹

However, Fückslein is not the only one to be betrayed. That is also Allan's fate and his hurt at Ann's treachery is the greater since, as he discloses to her at the end, he had saved her when he abandoned the drawing of lots after he saw that she had drawn the fateful one. The symbolic nature of his death, as he lies as if crucified, and the last line of the play – 'WIEDER EINMAL IST ES VOLLBRACHT' (820) – not only point to the theme of the regeneration of man, but in view of Kaiser's identification with Allan, they are a reminder of an important fact mentioned in the Introduction, that he also in later life saw himself as Jesus.

Ann's cynical attack on the churches is a symptom of Kaiser's extreme pessimism at this stage, and his antagonism to the Christian religion (though not towards Jesus or Mary) is even more pronounced in other writings of this late period of his life. One particular example should be mentioned, a projected prose work about Mary to be called *Maria Zimmerman*. He referred to this on a number of occasions in his letters from early 1942 on, eventually speaking as if it were actually in manuscript form. To what extent this was so, since any manuscript has disappeared, is uncertain.³⁰ Kaiser does not outline the plot in his letters, but comments give some

²⁹ For an account of what has been called 'the quite frightening connection between Judas and anti-Semitism', see Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil*, London, 1992. The quotation is from James Veitch, 'Judas Iscariot: The Dark Shadow on Jesus the Galilean', in James Veitch (ed.) *To Strive and Not to Yield* (Wellington, 1992, 87-101) 89. The red hair that Kaiser gives Fückslein was a characteristic mark of Judas in mediaeval art, and figures also in hostile portraits of Jews in later European literature - Maccoby 114 & 118.

³⁰ See, for instance, Marx (1970) 150 (30/11/44) & (12/12/44), & 164 (20/5/45). A commentator has noted that 'it seems that Kaiser used the project of a novel primarily in order to get an advance from his publisher' - Kieser (1980a) 182.

clues to the projected, if not actual, content. In writing to Julius Marx at the beginning of 1944, he said:

Das [*Maria Zimmermann*] wird ein furchtbares Buch. Mir hob sich der Vorhang von finsterster Landschaft, wie sie noch keines Wesens Auge erspähte. Jetzt sehe ich Jesus richtig - den von Gott instichgelassenen Verkünder. 'Ich habe Gott verkündet' - so steht es warnend unter dem neuen Kruzifix. Und der verwandelte Jesus spricht: 'Ich habe die Partei der Menschen ergriffen. Ich kann Gott nicht länger verteidigen.'³¹

Later, in a letter to the prospective publisher of the work,³² he made the claim that

... das Christentum ein zweitausendjähriges Blutbad ist und der furchtbarste Irrtum, den je die religiöse Menschheit vollzogen hat. Glücklicherweise nicht die ganze Menschheit, denn die Christen stellen nur einen Bruchteil der Gesamtheit dar. Ich grüsse jene, die nicht Christen sind ...

Zweimal Amphitryon was written shortly after the completion of *Das Floß der Medusa* and during the period in which Kaiser was writing about *Maria Zimmermann*. If it is to be interpreted in the manner suggested by Caesar von Arx, one has to ask how the antagonism towards Christianity that they exhibit in conjunction with Kaiser's pessimism was concurrently transformed into an optimistic belief in the divine mercy that would assist man's regeneration through turning his thoughts from war. However, if we reject that interpretation, what meaning are we to give to this vital last scene?

A pointer to a different interpretation may perhaps be found in *Zweimal Amphitryon* in the various references to authors contained in the several versions of

³¹ Letter 1249 [4/1/44]. This quotation should be compared with that from his letter to Frida Haller about his religious experience - Letter 1105, quoted above.

³² Letter 1468 to Friedrich Witz [16/1/45].

what transpired in the camp after the fall of Pharsala. In Zeus's account, in that of the Third Elder during the interview at the camp with the Captains, and at the trial, 'die Schreiber' are singled out for more detailed mention than is given the other men affected by the war. In the context of those others, the 'Töpfer - Tischler - alle Handwerksleute' (503), the term could be interpreted as merely scribes or clerks, but the specific reference makes it clear that this is a play on words³³ and that it is authors who are actually meant. The Third Elder's mention of them (485) has already been quoted and Zeus is no less laudatory in his story, where he says:

Auch von den Schreibern, die die Hüter sind
aus eingebor'nem Recht und gleicher Pflicht
des über alle Grenzen gespannten Reichs
des Geists, der in Vollendung führt die Schöpfung.
(474-475)

This is a reminder that the special position and responsibility of the artist in society was a recurrent motif in Kaiser's plays, and it is, moreover, one that is seen again in the two plays that followed *Zweimal Amphitryon* and form with it his *Hellenische Trilogie*.

The first of these, *Pygmalion*,³⁴ has obvious echoes of *Zweimal Amphitryon*. Here, too, Zeus intends to destroy the world, in his anger at man's greed and selfishness that are an abuse of the gifts bestowed on him. This time it is the goddess, Athene, who diverts Zeus from this course through her advocacy of the worth of the contribution to society made by the artist, whom she terms 'heiliges Geschlecht' (524). The sculptor, Pygmalion, has just finished work on a beautiful statue and, as

³³ Passage & Mantinband (1974) 293.

³⁴ *Werke* 6, 515 (Nov.1943/ Feb.1944).

usual, the fulfilment of his creative impulse has left him feeling drained and has brought him back to a world far removed from the world of his inner vision. In despair he is contemplating suicide but Athene prevents him, telling him of her approach to Zeus and assuring him that his statue stands a witness to Zeus of the validity of her plea. 'Dieses Zeugnis/ war gültig für den Gott. Dir dankt Athene! - -' (524).

At the end of the play there is a trial scene where, once again, the improbable but true version of events given by the defendant, Pygmalion, is greeted with complete disbelief and disregarded by the court in pronouncing judgment (588-590). As in the earlier play the court's inability to accept anything outside its own experience is a barrier to any serious investigation of the defendant's claim and it is also a further reminder of Kaiser's own trial and what he perceived as the closed mind of the judge in that case.³⁵

The theme of the artist's position in society is brought out in Athene's words to Pygmalion shortly after she appears to him for the first time, when she tells him:

Um die Kunst ist angst mir,
die bei den Menschen wohnt und immer fremd ist.
So seid ihr Künstler Fremdlinge im Volk,
das lieber steinigt als den Genius sieht.
(522)

And at the trial the Athenian fig-dealer, Konon, speaks for the uncaring masses when he says:

³⁵ Derrenberger ((1971) 130 n. 71) says of the trial scene in *Pygmalion* that it is 'as if Kaiser were wryly parodying his own outbursts in his rug trial'.

Was soll mir Kunst, fragt' ich mich still,
 der ich ein Kaufmann bin und alles buche?
 Wie buch' ich Kunst in Eingang und in Ausgang?
 Wo setz' den Zins ich an? Wie heckt mein Geld?
 (576)

Pygmalion, like his creator, has no doubts about his own capability, his own importance to society. 'Bin ich nicht schaffend einem Gotte gleich?' (525), he asks Athene and, a little later, after she has agreed to the request he has made that the statue be brought to life, he says:

Schaffen will ich
 die Gnadenbilder für die ganze Menschheit,
 die sie beim Gott entschuldigt. Läutern will
 den Sinn der Menschen ich durch meine Kunst.
 (526)

He also resembles Kaiser in his belief that the importance of his art is an answer to criticism of his behaviour, as he excuses his neglect of Korinna, the woman who has supported him, in the words: 'Man muß viel opfern, daß die Kunst entstehe - /den leichten Umgang - Ansehn - Dankbarkeit.' (580).

Bellerophon,³⁶ the third of the three plays, also has as its theme the position of the artist, with the emphasis here on the trials he faces in an unfriendly world. Bellerophon has been brought up by Apollo (in the guise of a wise shepherd), who fashions for him a beautiful lyre made out of willow twigs, before leaving him to be found and taken home by King Proitos. When he is accused by the Queen, Anteia, of an attempt at seduction, the King, though aware that it was she who had been guilty

³⁶ *Werke* 6, 607 (1944).

of the attempt, accedes to her vengeful demand that Bellerophon be killed. To avoid doing the act himself he sends the youth with a message to one of his governors, Jobates, the message being an instruction to kill the messenger within the hour. This is not done, as Jobates does not read the message, Bellerophon and Jobates' daughter, Myrtis, meet and fall in love and Bellerophon with his lyre-playing encompasses the death of the monster, the Chimaera,³⁷ which the Oracle at Delphi had said could only be destroyed by someone without sin.

At the end Apollo appears to tell the pair the purpose of Bellerophon's stay on earth:

dir die Gefährtin zu erlesen für
den einsamen Verein der Ewigkeit,
die - Götter - wir uns mit den Sternen schmücken
der reinsten³⁸ Menschen, da auch wir allein.
- - Zu jüngstem Stern verbindet ihr euch so
und seid entrückt in unerreichte Weite
des Lichts, das unverlöschlich sternenhell.
(681)

He then disappears after presenting Bellerophon with a beautiful new lyre to replace the willow-twigg one that had fallen to pieces in his hand. Bellerophon and Myrtis are carried out of sight on the back of the winged horse sent by Apollo and the final line in the play is the stage direction: *'In blauer Sternennacht entbrennt ein neuer Stern'* (682).

Bellerophon is clearly representative of the artist, whose creative gifts place

³⁷ Here there is a reminder of Herakles' future exploits, as prophesied by Zeus (512).

³⁸ Bellerophon's purity accords with Kaiser's vision of regenerated man.

him above ordinary mortals but whose worth is unrecognized on this earth. In Apollo's words:

- - Ich lieb' dir zauberisch das Weidenspiel,
das jedes Ohr verwundern müßte, wie
von kargen Ruten tönt es - ehrfürchtig
begegnet man ihm, der das Wunder rührt.
Doch stumpf und dumpf verhärtet Taubheit sich
und wüste Überlegung sinnt den Tod.
(681)

But he is here more than the representative of artists in general - he is his creator. To

Alma Staub Kaiser wrote just after finishing the play:

Gestern vollendete ich das dritte hellenische Stück: BELLEROPHON. Ich habe mich selbst in die Sterne versetzt - wohin ich mehr gehöre als auf diesen irdischen Plan.³⁹

He had already written to Caesar von Arx in similar terms and a day or so later he wrote another letter telling him that his earlier expressed wish to be buried in the Wallis Canton was not now important. He went on:

Wo ich falle, soll man mich eingraben. Nur folgenden Grabstein wünsche ich mir:

BELLEROPHON

Nichts weiter auf dem Stein. Nur diesen Namen.⁴⁰

The following comment by Koepke is very much to the point.

Wir sollten das sehr direkt und wörtlich verstehen. Kaiser wollte nicht als Dichter des BELLEROPHON begraben werden, sondern als Reinkarnation des Bellerophon, als Bellerophon, wie er sich selbst geschaffen hat. Es ist die Korrektur des Künstlerschicksals, die Kaiser hier vornimmt: [...] Kaiser schafft

³⁹ Letter 1285 [3/4/44].

⁴⁰ Letters 1283 [2/4/44] and 1286 [4/4/44].

sich selbst die Unsterblichkeit, die ihm die Menschheit versagte.⁴¹

The evidence suggests that the three plays in the *Hellenische Trilogie* should be read as one, with the figure of the artist as the connecting link. That there is such a figure to be found in *Zweimal Amphitryon* quickly becomes apparent when we remember that, as was noted in the Introduction, Kaiser identified himself with Jesus. His attitude included no acknowledgment of Jesus' divinity, as Marx indicates when, just prior to his statement about the identification, he talks of Kaiser's speaking of Christ: 'den er jedoch nur Jesus nannte'. Marx goes on: 'Er bezeichnete den Nazarener als ein "Genie der sozialen Humanität"...'.⁴² The claim that Kaiser made in one of his letters about *Maria Zimmerman* – 'auch Jesus war nur ein Dichter'⁴³ – completes a picture of how he saw Jesus and how he saw himself in relation to Jesus. However, in terms of the biblical parallel, Herakles is the symbolic equivalent of Jesus, so that it becomes possible to see in him, the prospective saviour of the world, a symbol also for Kaiser, but Kaiser as the outstanding representative of artists in general, whose potential gift to the world is the creative spirit. It is the direct opposite of that spirit, namely, the destructive urge that finds its expression in warfare, that is the subject of such strong censure in *Zweimal Amphitryon*.

It is reasonable to suggest that in this last scene Kaiser has adopted the Christian symbolism involved in the New Testament parallel in order to demonstrate

⁴¹ Koepke (1980) 219-220.

⁴² Marx (1970) 100 (27/8/41).

⁴³ Letter 1359 to Friedrich Witz [17/9/44].

the opposition of these two aspects of human nature and put forward the view that the power to redeem the world rests with the artist – that it is the creative spirit that will in time turn man's thoughts from war and accomplish his regeneration. This is the very claim that Pygmalion makes with his use of the word 'läutern' in his exuberant response to Athene's promise to give life to his statue, and the word is an echo of the word that Zeus uses in relation to Amphitryon when he sends him off into exile – 'Die Strafe soll dich läutern'.

This reading of Zeus's announcement of the coming birth of Herakles requires a further look at the role of both his parents, Zeus and Alkmene. Although Herakles is identified as the future redeemer of mankind, to Alkmene belongs the honour of having rescued it from immediate destruction through her prayer to Zeus to send Amphitryon to her even as a goatherd, and her subsequent delight in Zeus/Amphitryon's appearance. In her longing for her husband and her feelings of ecstasy when with the god, she surely represents the positive, creative side of human nature, and in turning Zeus's mind away from his plan of man's destruction she demonstrates its power to counteract the opposing destructive force. For Zeus exhibits both forces. The destructive tendency is clearly seen in his intention to destroy the world and in his judgment of Amphitryon, but under Alkmene's influence it is eclipsed by the creative urge evident in his promise to redeem the human race through his son. The coexistence of both aspects of human nature is to be seen in Kaiser's statement in his defence speech at the trial: 'Ich muß meine Kinder schlachten können, wenn ich an mich glaube'.⁴⁴ As has already been noted, Zeus in

⁴⁴ *Werke* 4, 563.

his denunciation of war is the mouthpiece for Kaiser, for whom not only Herakles, but his father as well, can thus be seen as a symbol.

This summation fails to explain the optimism for the future of mankind that is suggested by Zeus's promise of what Herakles will achieve, when that is contrasted with the pessimism Kaiser displayed both before and after writing *Zweimal Amphytrion*. It is a question, however, whether Zeus's statement, despite the positive way it is expressed, is to be seen as expressing Kaiser's firm conviction that the world will be transformed by the creative spirit of the artist, or merely voicing his belief that it could be, if – and it is a very big 'if' – mankind will only listen to the artist's message.

Some support for the latter view can be obtained from a letter Kaiser wrote to Caesar von Arx at the end of 1940,⁴⁵ outlining the plot of a play to be called *Die göttliche Tragödie*, of which only two lines remain, under the title *Jesus*.⁴⁶ In the letter he said:

Sie kennen die antikischen Legenden von Göttern, die sich verwandelten, um sich mit Menschen zu vereinen. Der Gott als Schwan - der Gott als Stier.⁴⁷
Ich lasse den Gott der Bibel Mensch werden.

He went on to describe the plot. God comes down to earth in the person of Joseph in order to observe the behaviour of men, in consequence of a request from

⁴⁵ Letter 723 [5/12/40].

⁴⁶ *Werke* 6, 731 (1940/41).

⁴⁷ Kaiser had already written a play on this theme - *Europa* (*Werke* 1, 581 (1914/15)).

the angel in charge of the gates of Paradise that mankind should be given another chance. The angel says that life has been terrible for human beings since they were cast out of the Garden of Eden – their punishment has been greater than they deserved. God marries Mary, an orphan, in a ceremony attended by the whole village. In due course Jesus is born and, as he grows older, Mary wants God to divert him from activities that are bringing him into danger, but God refuses, as He wants to observe the people's behaviour – to learn of what vileness they are capable. God is present at the crucifixion and then leaves the earth, taking Jesus with Him. He calls the angels together and shows them the broken body of His son, after which, in Kaiser's words, 'Das Urteil über die Menschen ist endgültige Verdammung'.

The mood in which that project was conceived, though very much in line with Kaiser's prevailing attitude in those years, is the exact opposite of the mood of *Zweimal Amphitryon* if the latter play is interpreted as expressing the certainty, rather than merely the possibility, of man's regeneration. That would be a strange development if, as seems probable from its starting point of God becoming man and fathering a child on a mortal woman, the earlier plan contained the germ that eventually developed into the later work. Moreover, it is not borne out by the other two plays in the trilogy. In the first of them, *Pygmalion*, the artist's potential to redeem the world is not able to be realized. As already noted, Pygmalion's exultant claim that he will reform mankind is made on the understanding that he will have the animate statue, Chaire, by his side. Instead, he is sent by the court to live with the unsympathetic Korinna, in order to recover from his 'Mondsucht' (590), and Chaire is returned to stone. When Athene appears again, in response to Pygmalion's second

attempt to kill himself, he utters the despairing cry: 'Kann ich denn schaffen, wenn sie [Chaire] mir verbannt ist ...' (597). Finally, *Bellerophon* exemplifies the ordinary person's inability to recognize artistic genius and consequent failure to appreciate the artist's vision of a better life, in which people live at peace.

It is difficult to interpret the ending of *Zweimal Amphitryon* as expressing more than Kaiser's hope for man's regeneration and his suggestion as to the manner of its possible accomplishment.

Chapter IX – Conclusion

Writing in 1980 about Kaiser in his exile years, Rolf Kieser makes the following comparison between him and Brecht:

Wenn man das Frühwerk der beiden Dichter mit den Werken der Exiljahre vergleicht, wird vielmehr deutlich, daß Brecht künstlerisch seinem Höhepunkt entgegenstrebte, Kaiser sich dagegen im steilen Absinken befand.¹

The last part of this statement is not borne out by a close study of *Zweimal Amphitryon*.

Kaiser's use of the material from which he has drawn inspiration for his plays is always highly original and in this respect *Zweimal Amphitryon* is no exception. In this play, he has rewritten the old myth of Zeus's seduction of Alkmene, and his fathering of Herakles, in terms of his own perspective regarding the state of the world in the last years of his life; and his original turn of mind is evident in the skilful way in which he has blended that story with two other important sources having certain similar features, namely, August Friedrich Ernst Langbein's poem *Das Märchen von König Luthbert*, with its basis in a literary tradition with roots in Asian fairy tales, and its incorporation of the motif of the heavenly double, and the New Testament account of the conception of Jesus. The interest of the play is considerably enhanced by frequent references to, or reminders of, various classical and other sources, that are designed to lend atmosphere to the story, to emphasize certain characteristics or to accentuate the emotional content.

¹ Kieser (1980b) 155.

As Kaiser himself said, his plays were a means of presenting his ideas to the public, and it is his ideas on three important themes that had long held his interest that are most noticeable in this play. First of all, the work is a very forceful condemnation of war in general and the then current war in Europe in particular, and clearly expresses the author's pacifist viewpoint, fuelled by his hatred of Hitler and the menace of the Nazi regime. The second theme, manifest in Zeus's promise of the advent of Herakles and his task of reforming a world of which Kaiser often despaired, embodies the author's Expressionist vision of the regeneration of man, a vision he articulated in *Vision und Figur*,² written as early as 1918. That essay opens with the statement: 'Aus Vision wird Mensch mündig: Dichter'; and ends with the words: 'Von welcher Art ist die Vision? Es gibt nur eine: die von der Erneuerung des Menschen'. Finally, there is Kaiser's firm belief in the importance of the work of the artist (whether painter, sculptor, writer or musician) and his consequent special position in society, a theme that emerges most clearly when the three plays in the trilogy of which *Zweimal Amphitryon* forms part are considered as a whole.

In addition to this, however, *Zweimal Amphitryon* raises a number of issues that are not only important in themselves, but also throw light on the author's own personality – issues involving such diverse questions as those of morality and the nature of justice, of the concept of guilt and responsibility, of human worth and of love, and of the dangers of our flawed perception of reality.

² *Werke* 4, 547-549.

With one exception, little direct influence from the earlier *Amphitryon* plays is to be seen in Kaiser's play, the exception being the work of the man he so greatly admired, Kleist. In a letter to Caesar von Arx in May 1943, Kaiser enthusiastically announced his conception of *Zweimal Amphitryon* in the following terms: 'Ein herrlicher neuer Amphitryon ist mir aufgegangen. Der Entwurf überbietet Molière und Kleist'.³ In what way, other than on an overall view, he felt his work would outstrip Molière's is not obvious; the plays are very different – Molière's a court comedy, Kaiser's a serious attack on evil. However, the main influence of Kleist's play is obvious from a comparison between the portrait of Alkmene and her relationship with Zeus in that work and the corresponding portrait and relationship in Kaiser's play. Kleist's Alkmene has served as the model for Kaiser's heroine in the way in which she idolizes Amphitryon, seeing him in effect as a god. Each of them discovers through her association with a true god that her husband is no more than human, but Kaiser inverts the process by which that discovery is achieved and in so doing completely changes its effect on Alkmene, so that, instead of the sorely tried and confused character of the earlier play, we see at the end a woman with a definite sense of purpose, freed of her unnatural dependence on the man she has married.⁴

³ Letter 1132 [15/5/43]. The day before he had written to Julius Marx in virtually the same terms - Letter 1131.

⁴ See also the comment of Koepke in (1980) 216:

Kaiser korrigiert Kleist damit in zwei entscheidenden Punkten: Amphitryon kann nicht Mensch sein, solange er Heerführer ist, und Alkmene kann daher nur den Gott lieben, der durch sie menschlich wird; Herakles, ihr Sohn, wird die entscheidende Tat der Reinigung der Erde vollbringen und gerade durch seine Menschlichkeit glänzen.

Alkmene's role in the play is perhaps symbolized by the words Kaiser puts in the mouth of Zeus when the latter tells the citizens of Thebes of his decision to test Alkmene's sincerity in asking for an Amphitryon 'der nur ein Mensch war - weiter nichts als Mensch! - -'. The god is delighted to find in the form of Alkmene's prayer a recognition that the worth of a person is not measured by what he has done or by any of his external attributes such as his office or his reputation, but is of the essence of his humanity, intrinsic to his very being. It is Zeus's appreciation of this attitude that makes Alkmene such a special person in his eyes and that prompts him, despite his disgust at the behaviour of mankind generally, first to postpone his planned destruction of the world and ultimately to give up the plan altogether. There is no reason to think that Zeus's words were not a reflection of Kaiser's own thinking, and yet it is an approach that he did not accept in relation to himself. We recall the words he used in his defence speech at his trial, as already quoted in the Introduction: 'Unsinnig ist der Satz: Es ist alles gleich vor dem Gesetz. Ich bin nicht jedermann'. It was not his guilt in the eyes of the law that he refused to accept, but the basically moral principle of equality before the law on which he was being judged. If we look for a moral basis for his claim to be exempt from punishment, we have to accept that in his eyes it was enough that he was a very great artist – a genius in fact. That this entailed a subjective judgment that did not permit of its elevation to a general principle was immaterial. Kaiser viewed life from the perspective of his own egocentricity and that fact is reflected in the contradiction between his conviction of his own superiority and the implication of the very significant words he puts into Zeus's mouth.

Kaiser's approach to morality is also to be seen in an important feature of the play not directly attributable to an outside source, but to some extent inspired by his own past, namely, *Amphitryon's* trial before the Elders and his sentence by them for an offence he did not commit. It is surprising, in view of its significance in the play, and the evidence it presents of the author's ability to go to the heart of a problem, that this has not attracted the attention of commentators. The focus of the earlier *Amphitryon* plays was the problems faced by the human characters as a result of Jupiter's appearance, problems arising out of their sense of identity and Alkmene's unwitting adultery. Kaiser has ignored these problems. Instead he effectively isolates the real cause of the difficulties that were experienced in those plays, and throws light on a fundamental problem in human relations, namely, the inherent unsoundness of our perception of reality. The difference between appearance and reality was an issue that he had explored in its various aspects in other works, notably *Der Protagonist*,⁵ *Zweimal Oliver*⁶ and *Klawitter* (already referred to in the Introduction). In *Zweimal Amphitryon* he demonstrates its effect on the reliability of our judgments and offers a salutary lesson on the possible seriousness of the consequences that can flow from over-confidence in the accuracy of one's own observations and experience.

Further, the scene of the trial, in conjunction with its sequel in Zeus's replacement of the sentence imposed by the Elders with his own sentence for the different offence of warmongering, is a revealing guide to the author's own personality. First, it reinforces the evidence of Kaiser's own trial, that for him

⁵ *Werke* 5, 723 (1920).

⁶ *Werke* 2, 457 (1925/26).

morality was more important than legality. But it was morality as he saw it, and not necessarily what convention accepted. Zeus's punishment of Amphitryon for an act not regarded as an offence by his fellow-citizens reflects a moral view of the act, but it disregards another, very important, question of morality, and hence of justice – that involved in a sentence imposed on other than a regular, previously defined, basis, a basis that is generally regarded as essential in the Western World. Second, the punishment of Amphitryon alone ignores the fact that the ultimate responsibility for the attack on Pharsala rests with the Elders who authorized it, even if they cannot be blamed for the way the attack proceeded or for Amphitryon's further ambitions. That neither they, nor the Captains whose pusillanimity leads them to acquiesce in Amphitryon's future plans, suffer any penalty demonstrates Kaiser's inconsistency in not applying the views that he has expressed here and in other plays of the extent to which supporters of another's evildoing are themselves culpable.

Kaiser's attitude at his own trial was that his value to society was such that his actions should be judged, not by conventional standards of wrongdoing, but by the end they were designed to serve – the advancement of his work. It is this view that is reflected in the approach implicit in Zeus's adultery with Alkmene under cover of his impersonation, his deception of the people of Thebes generally and his unhesitating acceptance of the role of judge in relation to Amphitryon. Zeus's actions are not to be judged by ordinary human standards; he is a god and his superior status means that the importance of his objective provides a more than sufficient vindication of any wrongdoing associated with whatever he does in order to achieve it.

This study has shown that Kaiser's *Zweimal Amphitryon* is a complex amalgam resulting from many diverse influences: from myth, literary tradition, contemporary political events, the author's personality and biography. Detailed investigation of all these sources, but especially of the political and personal dimension, has resulted in fresh insights into the play that in part complement, in part modify or contradict the findings of earlier commentators. The process of reinterpretation will no doubt continue – that ever productive process that finds so fascinating an embodiment in Kaiser's play. The writer is content if her study helps to contribute to a reassessment of Kaiser's unjustly neglected masterpiece.

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Note:

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