6. Kleist’s Metamorphoses

Some Remarks on the Use of Mythology in Penthesilea

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
  sniffing the trace of air!
Haie! Haie!
  These were the swift to harry;
These were the keen-scented;
These were the souls of blood.

(Ezra Pound, ‘The Return’)

It has never been exactly fashionable to talk about the sources of Heinrich von Kleist’s plays. One can see why: Amphitryon does not make adequate sense in terms either of Plautus or Molière; Die Hermannsschlacht/Hermann’s Battle has little essentially to do with Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (or Tacitus); Prinz Friedrich von Homburg/The Prince of Homburg very soon moves away from its already dubious historical base. We find that, even having established sources and influences, we

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published as ‘Kleist’s Metamorphoses. Some Remarks on the Use of Mythology in Penthesilea’, Oxford German Studies, 14 (1983), 35–53. Kleist studies have moved on a great deal since this paper was published. Above all, the subject of metamorphosis and sacrifice has been enhanced by application of the insights of Walter Burkert, Homo necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972). Examination of Kleist’s sources is, however, still not a superfluous occupation.

2 This is a much-expanded version of a paper read at Trinity College, Dublin in April, 1982. The Ezra Pound poem I include by way of acknowledgment of my debt to Mr Charles Tomlinson’s Clark Lectures on the Metamorphic Tradition, given in Cambridge during the Lent Term, 1982 and published as Poetry and Metamorphosis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
are nowhere into the works, still outside their frame of reference and ignorant of the interplay of characters. Or at least one assumes this to be so. For most of the monographs on Kleist over the last two generations or so — and it is not my intention to list them — tend to discuss heroes, plot, language, feeling, fate and tragedy, without referring substantially either to Kleist the man in his times or Kleist the user of sources. Most of the discussion of his neoclassical tragedy Penthesilea, with some notable exceptions, falls into this same category.

But even so it might not really matter. For the use of classical sources in the Classical and Romantic periods is no absolute guide to the nature of a work. Examples spring to mind. We have still a great deal to explore once we have established that Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s Iphigenie auf Tauris/Iphigenia in Tauris is based on Euripides or that Die Braut von Messina/The Bride of Messina has affinities with Oedipus Rex. We might well recognize that these two works are more ‘modern’ than ‘classical’: that, despite the costume, neither play is ‘antique’; that each has its own age’s, not antiquity’s, view of mythology; that there is consequently no single absolute and given ‘world picture’, but several; that each play is general and tends toward set formulae of expression. Having established this, however, we should be well on our way towards understanding the text: not only as a ‘timeless’ work but also as a product of its time; as the product of a certain understanding of classical antiquity, whereby ancient myth or archetypal situation is ‘metamorphosed’ to suit the need of a special, later age.


And yet with Kleist it seems to be different. If we try to compare *Penthesilea* with the other classicizing dramas just cited, we find irreconcilable differences, gulfs fixed, between Kleist and the traditions of Weimar. Indeed, Kleist seems to have wished it so: in a letter of February 6, 1808, Adam Müller, Kleist’s collaborator in *Phöbus*, could write to Friedrich Gentz: ‘Demnach ist Kleist sehr mit Ihnen zufrieden, wenn Sie von der Penthesilea sagen, dass sie nicht antik sey’. 5 *Penthesilea*, Müller avers, is not beholden to tradition; it eschews ‘Ruhe’ and ‘Wohllaut’ and ‘Annehmlichkeit’ — the accepted bienséance of classicizing tragedy in any tradition; indeed, it deliberately does not imitate the Greeks in the manner received in *Iphigenie* or *Die Braut von Messina*. Nor even does it veer in the opposite direction; it is not Christian in the Romantic, medievalizing, sense of, say, Friedrich Schlegel’s *Alarcos* or Zacharias Werner’s *Attila* or Ludwig Tieck’s *Genoveva*. Coming closer to the ‘antik’, it is not Goethe’s *Pandora* or the mellifluous trimeters of Wilhelm von Schütz. Indeed, Ludwig Robert, writing in 1824 to Kleist’s first editor, Tieck, remarked on the play’s ‘derbe Auffassung des Antiquen’, 7 as if anticipating those many reactions, right up to the present day, to the supposed anti-classical, anti-*Iphigenie*, anti-*Pandora* strain of the tragedy.

It would of course depend on what one understood by ‘classical’. It would also depend on the choice of subject. For *Penthesilea* is not, like *Iphigenie*, based on a single Greek original; nor is it, like *Die Braut von Messina*, a freely invented story in a framework of classical tragedy. It is known to be an adaptation of several different stories, or myths, from Greek antiquity. The dignity of the classical subject, yet the dynamic urgency towards action on or off stage, remind us, however, of Kleist’s stated ambition from the outset of his career as a dramatist: his bid to conjoin Sophocles and Shakespeare, but also, with a female central character and a suitably tragic subject, to outdo Friedrich Schiller. Going back beyond the later Schiller, it would even seem to retain much of the *Sturm und Drang*’s (‘Storm and Stress’) active and dynamic understanding of Shakespeare, and some of that movement’s energetic,

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6 ‘Calm’, ‘euphony’, ‘harmony and balance’.

7 ‘Crude notion of the antique’. *Penthesilea*, ed. by Sembdner, 43.
'Dionysian' attitude to classical antiquity. But all this must remain speculation until we examine the subject matter itself.

Where did Kleist find the subject in the first place? It is worth noticing first of all where he did not seek it: he did not follow the standard practice of neoclassical writers and look to Sophocles or Euripides or Seneca, not, therefore, to the lineage of Cristoph Martin Wieland’s Alceste or Goethe’s Iphigenie or even August Wilhelm Schlegel’s Ion. Another possibility open to him was the extension of an existing story, and here the parallel with Goethe’s epic fragment Achilleis springs to mind. But Penthesilea is, if anything, certainly not Homeric, even though it draws briefly on sources relating to the continuation of the Trojan War. Instead of a single story, Kleist seems to have taken several, disparate, mythologically seemingly unrelated elements and to have moulded them into an organic whole. The source he used — this was established generations ago — was Benjamin Hederich’s Gründliches mythologisches Lexicon/Compendious Mythological Dictionary. I repeat this highly accessible piece of information solely because Kleist scholars only rarely draw on it.8

Hederich’s Lexicon is a garrulous, ramshackle and fusty mythological compendium, an inventory of all the stories of gods and heroes that antiquity had to offer. The subtitle of the 1770 edition makes its stated function clear: ‘Zu besserm Verständisse der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften nicht nur für Studierende, sondern auch viele Künstler und Liebhaber der alten Kunstwerke’.9 Such compendia belong to the hidden stock-in-trade of so much of German Classicism. Goethe is known to have used Hederich, if not exactly to have noised the fact abroad. The continued popularity of such lexica is indicated by Goethe’s former companion in Rome, Karl Philipp Moritz, producing a dictionary of mythology more in keeping with Weimar Classicism, Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten/The Gods of the Greeks and their

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8 The classical parallels were established in the apparatus to the first critical edition of Kleist, Werke. Kritisch durchgesehene Gesamtausgabe, ed. by Erich Schmidt, Georg Minde-Pouet and Reinhold Steig, 5 vols (Leipzig, Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1904–05). Helmut Sembdner draws on this material in his editions of Kleist and Penthesiliea.

9 ‘For a better understanding of the fine arts and sciences not only for students but also for many artists and aficionados of the antique art works’. Benjamin Hederich, Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon […] (Leipzig: Gleditsch, 1770; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967).
 Mythology of 1791, and interlarding its sections with suitable quotations from Goethe’s poetry and from Iphigenie. But such a compendium on classical antiquity could only be a kind of charnel-house of dead knowledge until metamorphosed by poetry into life. Goethe makes this plain in Faust II, in the scene ‘Laboratorium’. There, Wagner, not inspirted by the essential life-giving quality of the material he has assembled in his retort, is left behind by Homunculus, not joining the great festival of mythological creatures, gods and demigods, inert and living elements, which is the ‘Klassische Walpurgisnacht’.

Wagner — whose fate is to collect and collate — and the quirkily loquacious Hederich assembled much that was contradictory, superfluous or plain unsuitable. Kleist’s way of dealing with them was to be the same as Goethe’s: to give the disparate a symbolic unity. For if Goethe strove in the ‘Klassische Walpurgisnacht’ and the Helen scenes for a harmony of the Euripidean and the Baroque, the tragic and the grotesque, spirit and flesh, the Bacchic and the Winckelmannian, so Kleist in Penthesilea would draw — through Hederich — on Euripides and Ovid, but also on a whole host of unconnected, seemingly mutually irreconcilable material and conflate a private mythology, if one incompatible with all that Goethe’s stood for.

The main points of Kleist’s reading of Hederich can be summed up fairly briefly; it is their implications that are more important. We can safely assume that he found his subject in the Lexicon. For, even supposing that ‘Amazonian’ subjects were not unknown to an eighteenth century much more eclectic in its attitude to classical antiquity than is generally acknowledged, it is certain that an impetuous and ambitious Kleist would not search for information which is tucked away in Hyginus and Dictys, is the subject of a sustained simile in the eleventh book of the Aeneid, when it is all the time conveniently related by the indefatigable Hederich. But even that obliging well of information offered different accounts from its various sources: Penthesilea, who some — indeed most — say was vanquished by Achilles, is credited in one single obscure source with having conquered and killed the hero:

So erzählen auch wiederum andere, sie habe den Achilles erst selbst erleget, es sey aber solcher auf der Thetis, seiner Mutter, Bitten, wieder

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lebendig geworden, und habe sodann erst die Penthesilea wieder hingerichtet.\textsuperscript{11}

This Kleist changes. One may assume, because the myths place Achilles in the foreground; like Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, the play which Kleist enjoins Heinrich von Collin, in the famous letter of December 8, 1808, to see in polar relation to Penthesilea,\textsuperscript{12} the man is to be but the inadequate interpreter of woman’s signs and intuitions. The arrogant and heedless Graf Wetter vom Strahl is to be led to understanding by one who is as a child; the Homeric demigod is to gain intimations of a love which has no place in Homer’s account.

Did Kleist’s eyes then light on the next entry in Hederich, on the same page as ‘PENTHESILEA’: ‘PENTHEVS’,\textsuperscript{13} the story of a man torn to pieces by women, recorded in Euripides’ Bacchae and in Book Three of Ovid’s Metamorphoses? Did he use Hederich’s excellent system of cross-references, to move from PENTHEVS to the genealogical table of the descendants of Cadmus, finding that Agaue, the mother of Pentheus, was also the sister of Autinoë, the mother of the unfortunate Actaeon, another Ovidian metamorphosis of man into beast? Actaeon, whose name crosses the lips of one of the maidens bathing in Kleist’s unsettling, disturbing and distinctly unpleasant attempt at a Boucher-like rococo idyll, Der Schrecken im Bade/Fright while Bathing,\textsuperscript{14} and like the first Actaeon reminiscence in the original fragment of Penthesilea, also published in Phöbus? At any rate, the Amazon queen’s mastiffs which ‘ein grässliches Geheul anstimmen’\textsuperscript{15} bear names taken not only from Ovid, but from Hederich’s compendious list under ‘ACTAEON’.

So, too, the monstrous account of the practices of the Amazons which Penthesilea relates to an incredulous Achilles, is, even if Kleist introduces a slightly different device for Amazonian self-mutilation, borrowed from Hederich.\textsuperscript{17} Again — but here we enter the realm of speculation — he

\textsuperscript{11} ‘On the other hand there are sources recounting that she herself slew Achilles, but that he was restored to life at the pleading of his mother Thetis and thereupon put Penthesilea to death’. Hederich, Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon, col. 1940.

\textsuperscript{12} Heinrich von Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. by Helmut Semdner, 2 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1961), II, 818. Henceforth cited as SW in references.

\textsuperscript{13} Hederich, Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon, col. 1940f.

\textsuperscript{14} SW, I, 15–20.

\textsuperscript{15} ‘Which set up a frightful howling’. SW, I, 405.

\textsuperscript{16} Hederich, Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon, col. 52f.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., col. 203–10.
might have established from the ingenious cross-reference system and
the excellent mythological tables, that Penthesilea, through Otrere, was
a descendant of the terrible Mars, but that Cadmus and his unfortunate
descendants are also ultimately of the same lineage.\textsuperscript{18}

But all this, these fragments of classical myth, even though bound
by a thematic relation, would go nowhere towards constituting a work
of art. Not even the overt reminiscences of Euripides or Ovid, which
Erich Schmidt and others established so long ago, would do that. It
is nevertheless not irrelevant to reflect on what this mass of material
amounts to. It is, as commentator after commentator has remarked,
not the line of ‘Griechentum und Goethezeit’; of ‘Götterstille und
Göttertrauer’, which in Walther Rehm’s titles sum up the consensus
of eighteenth-century Classicism.\textsuperscript{19} It seems rather the world of antiquity,
the ‘Heathen World’, of which Alexander Pope, in the preface to the
Iliad, noted with Augustan displeasure: ‘Who can be so prejudiced in
their Favour as to magnify the Felicity of those Ages, when a Spirit of
Revenge and Cruelty, join’d with the practice of Rapine and Robbery
regn’d thro’ the World.’\textsuperscript{20} And indeed, the Homeric heroes of Kleist,
Achilles excepted, are not paragons except in their lustfulness and
brutality. But is the well-ordered Amazon state, its practices and its
cult, anything other than monstrous and unnatural? Are we really
supposed to believe in a \textit{contrat social}, a divinely ordained hierarchy?
Can the reminiscences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau be any other than a
crip parody of human equality, such as deludes the characters in \textit{Das
Erdbeben in Chili}/\textit{The Earthquake in Chile}, like the noble ideas of the Abbé
Raynal so dashed in \textit{Die Verlobung in St. Domingo}/\textit{The Engagement in
St. Domingo} or the natural justice saved only in the nick of time, and
with a conviction born of comedy, by the chance interventions in \textit{Der
zerbrochne Krug}/\textit{The Broken Jug}? Nor is the Amazon state compatible
with Hermann’s patriotic — if equally monstrous — vision of country
before right and justice, or the Brandenburg of Homburg’s poetically
idealized, paradisal dream. The Amazon state, of which Penthesilea is

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., TAB. XIII.
\textsuperscript{19} ‘The Greek Spirit and the Age of Goethe’; ‘The Calm of the Gods and Their
Mourning’. Walther Rehm, \textit{Griechentum und Goethezeit. Geschichte eines Glaubens}
(Berne: Francke, 1951); \textit{Götterstille und Göttertrauer. Aufsätze zur deutsch-griechischen
Begegnung} (Munich: Lehnen, 1951).
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope}, 10 vols (London: Methuen,
1939–69), VII, 14.
admittedly not the willing servant, stands between her and fulfilment. We should not overlook one of her last instructions, as she prepares for death: to scatter their most sacred relic, the ashes of Tanaïs.

Allusions to the Bacchic-Dionysian and Orphic revivals in German poetry do not provide a satisfactory answer to Penthesilea, either. For ‘Zeus erhabner trunckner Sohn’, as Klopstock so eloquently addresses him, the Dionysus of the early Goethe and of Heinse, even more that of Friedrich Hölderlin, while he belongs to a world of dark urge, mystery and numinousness, is also the god of the Dionysian, dithyrambic and frenzied line, who proclaims that poetry will be born out of tension, not stasis, out of dissolution into formlessness and primeval articulation — ‘spotten des Spotts mag gern frohlokender Wahnsinn’ — into living form, civilization in enthusiasm. As Klopstock’s opening to ‘Auf meine Freunde’, one of the century’s great Dionysian preludes, admits, echoing Plutarch centuries before and anticipating Nietzsche a century later, Dionysus is the god of manifold change, whose worship is full of destructions and disappearances, rending limb from limb; hence he continues with the line ‘Wie mit dem goldnen Köcher Latonens Sohn’, stressing that Apollo’s simplicity, unity and purity are needed to achieve form. The Dionysian, Euripidean, allusion in Penthesilea, to Pentheus, and Agaue, has to do rather with the awesome bull-headed Bromius, the ‘sexual animal’ who punishes with death and madness those who defile his worship.

Prothoe’s words — ‘Es ist die Welt noch, die gebrechliche, / Auf die nur fern die Götter niederschaun’ — suggest that the gods’ interventions in human affairs are inscrutable, ineffable, if not malevolent, impervious to human goodness, feeling and love, rendering frustrate man’s attempts to reach out to his fellows in nobler endeavour, in dignity and affection. Kleist’s Diana seems more like the goddess described in Johann Arnold


23 ‘As with the golden quiver Latona’s son’. Klopstock, Werke und Briefe, I, i, 6.


25 ‘It is the world still, the fragile,/ On which the gods look down but from afar’. SW, I, 2854f.
Kanne’s *Mythologie der Griechen/Greek Mythology* of 1805, demanding blood sacrifice, closer to her dog-headed sister Hecate; the ‘queen and huntress chaste and fair’ is not the one who ministers to women, but she, who, not content with tearing men apart who unwittingly stray into the sphere of her virginity, exacts a terrible punishment of maidens who break their vow to her. And Phoebus Apollo, whom Penthesilea invokes, whom she sees in the unattainable demigod Achilles, is not so much Musagetes, the god of healing and light and form, as seemingly the arrow-shooter, the god of plague and sudden death.

There is however nothing surprisingly new in Kleist’s depiction of the gods in an inhumane aspect. It might indeed be hasty to see in *Penthesilea* the anti-*Iphigenie* which it so manifestly seems to be. For Goethe’s so morally virtuous heroine has nevertheless to live with a Diana who demands appeasement by blood sacrifice and whose barbarous cult can be revived at any moment, and with an Apollo whose obedience requires, or seems to require, deceit. The ‘Parzenlied’ is an integral part of the play, not a mere reminiscence of a theogony now relegated to the past. If Iphigenie triumphs, then it is through her own inner strength of moral will and integrity, not because the gods themselves dispense harmony and light and humanity. Moritz’s *Götterlehre* was not silent on this side of the gods: ‘Denn der Mensch ist in diesen poetischen Darstellungen der höhern Wesen so etwas Untergeordnetes, dass auf ihn überhaupt, und also auch auf seine moralischen Bedürfnisse wenig Rücksicht genommen wird’. And he shows percipience in interspersing into his compendium the solemn verses of Goethe’s poem ‘Gränzen der Menschheit/Limits of Humanity’ [*sic*] and Iphigenie’s ‘Parzenlied’. Nor did Goethe’s later forays into Greek mythological drama exclude this aspect. *Pandora* contains in its completed form and in the planned continuation, the element of Dionysian frenzy and destructive mania. The scene ‘Vor dem Palaste des Menelas’ in *Faust II* is suffused with Euripidean dread and blood worship. And the same Goethe, who in

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27 ‘Song of the Fates’.
28 ‘For in these poetic representations of the higher beings man is something so subordinate that little notice if any is taken of his moral needs’. Karl Philipp Moritz, *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Unger, 1804), 4.
29 Ibid., 76ff., 263f.
1826 evinced only ‘Schauder und Abscheu’ at the memory of Kleist, was, a year later, to publish a fragment from the very scene of Euripides’ *Bacchae* that provides Kleist with his Euripidean quotation in scene 24 of *Penthesilea*. Yet the answer to all this is ready at hand. It is never Goethe’s final word; for him, daemonic, undirected energy never stands alone without reflexion, contemplation and inner self-awareness.

Without entering in to a discussion of the ground of Goethe’s notions of wholeness and harmony, we may remark that his view of classical mythology is shared by his younger contemporaries. For the Weimar-oriented mythology or theogony of Karl Philipp Moritz and the Romantic philosophy of symbol and myth had one significant feature in common: while admitting man’s impotence before the divine numen, the ‘Spiel der höheren Mächte’ (Moritz), ‘Alles, was nur geahnet wird’ (Georg Friedrich Creuzer), they were in basic agreement that myth was a means of leading to the absolute, the ‘Hülle der reinsten Liebe’ (Joseph Görres), ‘im Unendlichen das Endliche’ (Creuzer); as Ernst Cassirer says of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling: ‘ein Prozess, in dem Gott selbst wird, in dem er sich, als der wahre Gott, stufenweise erzeugt’. It leads, as Cassirer sums up the thought underlying the Romantic preoccupation with myth, to a sense of ‘unmittelbare Totalität des Daseins und Geschehens’, to ‘Einheit eines universellen Raumgefühls’.

Thus when Goethe uses, for instance, Creuzer’s *Symbolik und Mythologie*...

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33 ‘A process in which God becomes himself, in which he, as the true God, generates himself step by step’. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 3 vols (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1923–29), II, 10.

der alten Völker/Symbolism and Mythology of Ancient Peoples, he is sharing an underlying religious and philosophical perception of myth. Kleist — although analogies with Creuzer or Schelling are helpful and illuminating — seemingly does not. It is the same with other Romantics and their contemporaries: Friedrich Schlegel’s Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie/On the Study of Greek Poetry of 1795–97 or Geschichte der Poesie der Griechen und Römer/History of the Poetry of the Greeks and Romans of 1798 see the Bacchic, and the formal discipline, in Greek poetry, as equally valid parts of a historical process of organic development. (His brother August Wilhelm, while less an admirer of Euripides’ Bacchae, never abjures his allegiance to Johann Joachim Winckelmann.) Even Kleist’s friend Adam Müller, to whom I shall return later, shares the same underlying views of Greek tragedy as the Schlegels or Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, Tieck’s friend and the translator of Sophocles.

But, one may ask, is mythology really the key to Kleist’s play? Might he, like the Goethe of the recently-published Pandora, not simply abandon myth-making and concentrate on the psychological mysteries of his heroine? Could the mythological apparatus not be merely a means to an end? It is the perennial problem of classical adaptations, taking the elements one needs and adjusting them to one’s own, later culture, often running counter to the established mythological base (as in Goethe’s Iphigenie) or in Kleist’s case actually reversing the standard Homer-based narrative. I doubt it. For Kleist’s Greeks, Amazon piety is a source of bemused wonderment, even for Achilles the son of Thetis. But for the Amazons, the mythology (based, incidentally, fairly closely on Hederich) is binding, valid and imperative. Their mythology is their very existence. Their Amazon-ness is the key to their actions and to Penthesilea’s as well.35 Achilles’ presupposition seems to be, as was Schelling’s belief of Greek religion, that serving Mars before Troy is part of his own particular social order — different from Penthesilea’s — of some intelligible sense of community, of ‘Volk’, of family in the accepted sense; that, in Cassirer’s words again, ‘der “Götterstaat” wird zum getreuen Abbild des Organismus des sozialen Lebens’.36 For Achilles, it is natural that Penthesilea should return as his queen to Phthia, where, as a

36 ‘The “gods’ state” becomes a true image of the organism of social life’. Cassirer, Philosophie, 218.
reflection of the divine community on Olympus (where such conquests are also not unknown) the social order may be re-established. But such a human society, with dynasty, ruler and subject, as a macrocosm of the family, is for Penthesilea a consideration of secondary importance.

ACHILLES. Und woher quillt, von wannen ein Gesetz,
Unweiblich, du vergibst mir, unnatürlich,
Dem übrigen Geschlecht der Menschen fremd?

PENTHESILEA. Fern aus der Urne alles Heiligen,
O Jüngling: von der Zeiten Gipfel nieder,
Den unbetretnen, die der Himmel ewig
In Wolkenduft geheimnisvoll verhüllt.
Der ersten Mütter Wort entschied es also,
Und dem verstummen wir, Neridensohn,
Wie deiner ersten Väter Worten du.37

‘Er nennt sich marserzeugt, mein Völkerstamm’38 is for Penthesilea all she needs to know. Mars the bringer of war and discord, has, it is true, freed the Amazons from male bondage and slavery, if by deceit and massacre. It is, as it were, the stories of Judith and Holofernes or Jaël and Sisera, extended to a whole state. But Mars’ service is not perfect freedom; it is ‘unweiblich’, ‘unnatürlich’, capricious, heedless of personal choice, inexorable in obedience. Small wonder that Otrere, Penthesilea’s mother, in order ‘Mars […] weniger zu gefallen’,39 has tried to subvert the Amazonian rules in her daughter’s favour by recommending Achilles to her as a chosen mate. Mars, the father of Otrere (here Kleist changes the mythology slightly), but also of Harmonia, the mother of Cadmus, dwells, not in Olympian splendour, but in Hades, attended by the Furies:

37 ACHILLES: ‘Whence springs a law, and when,
Not woman’s, pray, ‘gainst nature,
Not known to mortal race elsewhere?
PENTHESILEA: Far, from the urn of all that’s sacred,
O youth, from the pinnacles of time,
Untrod, which heaven keeps
Wreathed in mysterious clouds.
Our primal mothers’ word decreed it so,
We silently obey, o Nereid’s son,
As you the words of your first fathers.’ SW, I, 1902ff.
38 ‘My people trace their origins to Mars’. SW, I, 1825.
39 ‘To please Mars less’. SW, I, 2167ff.
CHOR DER JUNGFRAUN mit Musik.

Ares entweicht!
Seht, wie sein weisses Gespann
Fernhin dampfend zum Orkus niedereilt!
Die Eumeniden öffnen, die scheuflischen:
Sie schliessen die Tore wieder hinter ihm zu."^{40}

The Eumenides, the black-skinned, grey-garmented maiden bitch-goddesses,\(^{41}\) the ‘Rasereyen’, ‘welche diejenigen nach Verdienste peinigten, die etwas böses begangen hatten und darüber mit den Göttern nicht wieder waren ausgesöhnet worden’,\(^{42}\) from Gryphius’ *Papinian* to Goethe’s *Iphigenie* associated with melancholy of soul, are part of Penthesilea’s own consciousness. For she in her turn associates her own emotional confusion, the welling turmoil of her breast, her ‘Freud’ and ‘Schmerz’,\(^{43}\) with the same Eumenides, who flee only in that moment when she senses that ‘Zum Tode war ich nie so reif als jetzt’.\(^{44}\)

But Diana, too, whose cult is celebrated in the orgies at Themiscyra, is a stern goddess who exacts cruel revenge on the disobedient. It is under the aegis of the austere huntress, the arrow-shooter, that love is to be consummated in a feast of animal-like procreation. When Penthesilea in her despair once involuntarily invokes the love goddess Aphrodite, the priestesses of Diana expostulate:

DIE OBERPRIESTERIN. Die Unselige!

DIE ERSTE PRIESTERIN. Verloren ist sie!

DIE ZWEITE. Den Erinnyen
Zum Raub ist ihre Seele hingegeben!\(^{45}\)

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\(^{40}\) ‘Ares goes hence!
See how his white steeds
Flee panting down to Orcus!
The Eumenids, frightful sisters,
Open for him the doors and shut them’. *SW*, I, 1735ff.


\(^{42}\) ‘Who tormented those according to their deserts who had done something wicked and were not reconciled again to the gods’. Hederich, *Gründliches Mythologisches Lexicon*, col. 1129.

\(^{43}\) ‘Joy’, ‘pain’.

\(^{44}\) ‘For death was I never so ripe as now’. *SW*, I, 1682.

\(^{45}\) ‘HIGH PRIESTESS: Accursed one!
FIRST PRIESTESS: She is lost!’
Aphrodite, the other love, not of mate for mate, but of partner for partner, which has no place in Themiscyra, is a name sacrilegious to the Amazons. We saw, too, how Diana’s brother, Phoebus Apollo, has his part in Penthesilea’s yearnings for Achilles. Yet he, too, is Ovid’s ‘deus arcitenens’ (‘bow-wielding god’), Klopstock’s ‘mit dem goldnen Köcher Latonens Sohn’, whose arrows can bring life or death.

The mythology therefore contains a symbolic unity, which is further sustained by important patterns of imagery in the play itself. The emblem of Mars’ sovereignty over the Amazons is the great bow borne by the queen; Diana and Apollo are marked by the same attribute. The Furies are deities of pursuit. All is now ready for the drama of chase and hunt. The imagery of the hunt has now become sufficiently established by commentators as to form part of the standard repertoire of studies on Penthesilea; bow and arrow, hounds and stag or lion are the dominant figures which bear the action along from the merely pictorial at the beginning to the enacted grisliness of the end. From the image of Achilles pursuing Penthesilea:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Denn wie die Dogg entkoppelt, mit Geheul} \\
\text{In das Geweih des Hirsches fällt: der Jäger,} \\
\text{Erfüllt von Sorge, lockt und ruft sie ab;} \\
\text{Jedoch verbissen in des Prachttiers Nacken,} \\
\text{Tanzt sie durch Berge neben ihm, und Ströme,} \\
\text{Fern in des Waldes Nacht hinein: so er,} \\
\text{Der Rasende, seit in der Forst des Krieges} \\
\text{Dies Wild sich von so seltner Art, ihm zeigte.} \end{align*}
\]

to Penthesilea’s savage revenge on the ‘stag’ Achilles:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jetzt unter ihren Hunden wütet sie,} \\
\text{Mit schaumbedeckter Lipp, und nennt sie Schwestern,} \\
\end{align*}
\]

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46 As in the studies by Dyer, Klotz, Brown, Kaiser and Sieck, referred to above in footnote 3.

47 ‘And like the baying hound once off the leash
Leaps on the antlered stag; and the hunter
Alarmed, calls out to entice it back:
But it, its teeth sunk in the noble neck,
It dances at his side through stream and heights
And forest’s night; so he,
The crazed one, since through the trees of war
A prize as rare as this one crossed his path’. \textit{SW}, I, 213ff.
Die heulenden, und der Mänade gleich,
Mit ihrem Bogen durch die Felder tanzend,
Hetz sie die Meute, die mordatmende,
Die sie umringt, das schönste Wild zu fangen,
Das je die Erde, wie sie sagt, durchschweift. 48

The tearing to pieces of Achilles is, in every sense, the climax of the play, the end towards which the female hunting instinct, the paradoxical affront to inviolate chastity, and the frenzy of frustrated feeling, must impel. It is, mythologically speaking, Ares, Diana, and now, Dionysus. Indeed, the climax of the action brings about a mythological process whereby humans not merely use the language of the chase, but are actually transformed, in reality or deluded frenzy, into beasts.

It is what the ancients called metamorphosis. 49 It is the passing of one form to another, an alteration of appearance, circumstances and character, in myth, for which Ovid’s stories of Echo and Narcissus, Apollo and Daphne, Philemon and Baucis, or Orpheus and Eurydice, have become archetypes. But metamorphosis is also the poetic process by which we see these religious myths reshaped and remoulded to suit the changing emphases of human consciousness from the times of the Greeks down to Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Valéry, Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden or Hans Werner Henze. They serve differing symbolic functions for aspects of human behaviour and emotions; they flesh out abstractions; they give some utterance towards saying that which otherwise cannot be spoken. Metamorphosis may be the act of kindness by which the gods transform men or women into birds or plants: Philomela the nightingale or Phyllis the almond tree or Daphne the laurel. It is that ‘Wolle die Wandlung’ of Rilke’s Orpheus. 50 But not all of the Ovidian metamorphoses are benevolent or beneficent: indeed, Book Three of the Metamorphoses records the dreadful catalogue of

48 ‘Now among her dogs she rages,
Foam-lipped, and calls them sisters,
Amid their howls, and Maenad-like,
Dancing through the fields with her bow,
Urges the pack, on murder bent,
Encircling her, to catch the finest prey
That ever, as she says, roamed on the earth’. SW, I, 2567ff.


50 ‘Wish for change’.
punishment on the children of Cadmus, the fearful vengeance of Juno and Diana and Dionysus. On this, Kleist seizes. We do not know whether Kleist had read Kanne’s *Mythologie der Griechen* — there is no evidence; yet Kanne makes an interesting remark about the nature of metamorphosis: ‘die Strafe eines Gottes hatte Menschen in Thiere verwandelt und nur menschenähnlich lebten diese im Thiere fort. So entstand die Metamorphose’. Later, Kanne informs us, it was ‘nicht Strafe, sondern Mitleiden der Götter’. And here Philomela or Daphne spring to mind. If we follow Kanne’s point further, we might say that Kleist has gone back to the primitive roots of Greek religion, beyond notions of pity or justice or compassion, to that of punishment. Actaeon was punished as part of the gods’ displeasure with the house of Cadmus; but the immediate cause was his unwitting incursion into the chaste regions of Diana’s bathing-place. Like Achilles, he unknowingly provoked the goddess’s wrath and was transformed immediately into a stag. Penthesilea, affronted, outraged, incensed by what she reads as Achilles’ deception, sees him as the stag on to which she sets her Ovidian-named hounds. But the frenzy, the Maenad-like dismembering of the object of her love, is Agaue’s. For as Agaue believes that she has torn a young lion and returns in triumph bearing instead the head of her son Pentheus, so Penthesilea emerges speechless, somnambulant, in a trance:

PENTHESILEA nach einer Pause, mit einer Art von Verzückung.
Ich bin so selig, Schwester! Überselig!
Ganz reif zum Tod o Diana, fühl ich mich!
Zwar weiss ich nicht, was hier mit mir geschehn,
Doch gleich des festen Glaubens könnt ich sterben,
Dass ich mir den Peliden überwand.\footnote{SW, I, 2864ff.}

Agaue’s frenzy was induced by Dionysus, for her failing to believe in the divinity of his mother, her sister Semele;\footnote{Kerényi, ‘Die Bacchantinnen’, 281.} and Pentheus’ death
was a fearful reminder that the gods requite the merest slight to their divinity, amid cruel mockery.\footnote{Winnington-Ingram, \textit{Euripides and Dionysus}, 10f.} Penthesilea, in the terms of the Amazon state, and in the eyes of its priestesses, has been made to become as one of Actaeon’s mastiffs or as the fawnskin-draped Bacchante Agaue, because she has disobeyed Mars and Diana. Her very attempt to worship or approach Achilles, the unattainable Phoebus, had been suffused with intimations of a bliss near to death, an awareness that the hunt could never bring her to the object of her desire. What she in human terms most ardently and naturally desires is a blasphemy and affront to a divine order, ‘In Wolkenduft geheimnisvoll verhüllt’. Like another heroine visited with madness because the order of state denies her heart’s fulfilment — Ophelia — Penthesilea, also in a frenzied state which reveals the true extent of her sexual longing, decks herself ‘with fantastic garlands’, ‘fantastically dressed with straws and flowers’:

\begin{verbatim}
Seht, seht, ihr Fraun! - Da schreitet sie heran,
Bekränzt mit Nesseln, die Entsetzliche,
Dem düren Reif des Hag’dorns eingewebt,
An Lorbeerschmuckes Statt, und folgt der Leiche,
Die Grässliche, den Bogen festlich schulternd,
Als wärs der Todfeind, den sie überwunden!\footnote{‘Look, women, look, how she prances, Crowned with nettles, fearful sight, Woven in with thornbush hoar In place of bays, behind the corpse, Gruesome view, shoulders the festive bow, As if her deadliest enemy she’d conquered’. \textit{SW}, I, 2704ff.} \footnote{‘We see in Euripides that a representative of the god, a bearer of his spirit, has to be there, who inducts the faithful, transfers his spirit on to them in sacramental acts, and teaches them the required sacred acts, the orgia’. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, \textit{Euripides and Dionysus}, 10f.} \end{verbatim}

This modern Shakespearean analogy, with a play whose scenic structure has more affinity with Shakespeare, seems in many ways more appropriate than one from religiously-based Greek tragedy. For Euripides’ \textit{Bacchae}, and the Roman \textit{Metamorphoses}, are originally texts relating to religious cult. As Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff remarks:

Wir sehen bei Euripides, dass ein Vertreter des Gottes, ein Träger seines Geistes da sein muss, der die Gläubigen weiht, den Geist auf sie durch sakramentale Handlungen überträgt, sie die erforderten heiligen Handlungen, die Orgia, lehrt.\footnote{‘We see in Euripides that a representative of the god, a bearer of his spirit, has to be there, who inducts the faithful, transfers his spirit on to them in sacramental acts, and teaches them the required sacred acts, the orgia’. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, \textit{Euripides and Dionysus}, 10f.}
Yet we seem to be closer to Kleist in a remark made in 1808, the year of *Penthesilea*, by August Wilhelm Schlegel, talking of a ‘Romantic’ Hamlet: ‘Das Schicksal der Menschheit steht da wie eine riesenhafte Sphinx, die jeden, der ihr furchtbares Rätsel nicht zu lösen vermag, in den Abgrund des Zweifels hinabzustürzen droht’.\(^\text{57}\) Kleist’s striving for a fusion of Greek tragedy and Shakespeare had, to borrow Schlegel’s words again, little of the religious ‘Besitz’, the ‘Boden der Gegenwart’ which are the Goethezeit’s secularized notions of Greek tragedy, but at most the modern ‘Sehnsucht’, ‘Schwermut’ and ‘Ahnung’\(^\text{58}\) of a postlapsarian view of man. Kleist had metamorphosed Hederich’s account of ancient religious belief and practice into a ‘letter that killeth’.

This would have *Penthesilea* presenting a uniformly bleak, uncompromising, cheerless and desperate aspect. And yet it might be possible, by turning to a source other than Hederich, to find a different, more positive, sense of ‘metamorphosis’ for this play.

My argument hitherto has been based on a simple application of known source material to the text of the play. It is possible to extend such evidence, this time more in the direction of biographical documentation, to a similar end. The merely biographical, of course, ‘proves’ nothing. On the other hand, a certain legitimacy seems to have established itself in studies of *Penthesilea*, whereby analogies from contemporary poetry and criticism are adduced by way of corroboration. In this way, it has been possible to avoid the extreme position of seeing Kleist as a poet writing out of no tradition, or solely in reaction against it (as in the case of his reading of Kant), while circumnavigating another promontory: that of seeing Kleist merely as the sum of impulses or reactions from outside. The notion of ‘metamorphosis’, as already defined, involves both assimilation, and recreation under the stamp of an independent personality. The assumptions behind my remaining remarks are largely biographical, not textual. They state facts readily available. It would of course be simplistic to rely too much on such evidence if there did

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\(^{57}\) ‘The fate of man stands there like an enormous sphinx, which casts everyone who fails to grasp her dreadful riddle into the abyss of doubt’. August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur, Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*, IV, i, ed. by Stefan Knödler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2018), 335.

\(^{58}\) ‘Possession’; ‘the ground of the present’; ‘longing’; ‘melancholy’; ‘intuition’. Ibid., V, 25.
not seem to be some thematic links with the play in question and its metamorphosis from mere source material into art. The facts in question are, simply, that Kleist attended Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert’s lectures in Dresden in the winter of 1807 and that Kleist, the co-editor of *Phöbus*, accepted and published material on the nature of tragedy. The question is: could he have been attracted by what he heard, and may he have assimilated ideas similar to those published?

Schubert’s lectures, delivered during the period in which Kleist is assumed to have been writing *Penthesilea*, were published in 1808 as *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft/Intimations of the Night Side of Science*. There is a general consensus that Schubert’s notions of ‘Ahndung’ and somnambulism, of higher intimations occasioned by states of magnetic sleep, mesmerism or hypnosis, are of considerable importance for our understanding of *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*.

That would seem appropriate for the ‘grosses historisches Ritterschauspiel’ and its ‘romantic’ connotations, some of which even a tried practitioner like Ludwig Tieck found too extreme. Schubert it is, too, who uses the analogy of the negative and positive poles (of a magnet) to distinguish between active striving for a higher existence, ‘Selbstthätigkeit’, on the one hand (positive) and ‘wahrhafte Passivität, welche uns der höheren Einwirkung fähig macht’ (negative), on the other. It might be the germ of Kleist’s much quoted letter to Collin about the interrelation of *Käthchen* and *Penthesilea*: yet there is no reason why Kleist, who already uses the image of magnetic poles in his letter to Marie von Kleist, which Sembdner dates as late autumn 1807, could not have lighted on the analogy independently. It is not my intention to force an interesting image common both to Kleist and Schubert. I mention it for what it may be worth. There are nevertheless, on the surface at least, striking parallels.

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59 ‘Intuition’.
60 Cf. Ursula Thomas, ‘Heinrich von Kleist and Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert’, *Monatshefte*, 51 (1959), 249–61 (NB: Thomas does not discuss *Penthesilea*).
61 ‘Grand romantic historical spectacle’.
62 ‘The activity of the self’; ‘true passivity that makes us receptive to higher intuitions’.
63 *SW*, II, 797.
64 There might, however, be some justification for redating the letter to the actual time when Schubert was giving his lectures, i.e. winter 1807.
between certain passages in the *Ansichten* and *Penthesilea*. Again, we must be circumspect, for aspects of Schubert’s nature mysticism, with their roots in various hermetic traditions (Jacob Böhme) and their echoes of Novalis or Steffens or Schelling or Ritter, may well not have appealed to Kleist, grounded as he was in less heady mathematical and scientific parallelism. Yet we know that Kleist’s fellow-countryman Achim von Arnim — for all their differences in outlook and temperament — who began in the empirical school of Ludwig Wilhelm Gilbert’s *Annalen der Physik/Annals of Physics*, was strikingly drawn by speculative mysticism such as Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s *Theorie der Geisterkunde/Theory of Spectrology* and Schubert’s *Ansichten*. All the same, passage after passage in Schubert has a striking ring when read with *Penthesilea* in mind. I quote a few of the more remarkable:

> Es ist ein ewiges Naturgesetz, das so klar da liegt, dass es sich dem Geist des Menschen zuerst aufdringen müssen, dass die vergängliche Form der Dinge untergeht, wenn ein neues, höheres Streben in ihnen erwacht, und dass nicht die Zeit, nicht die Aussenwelt, sondern die Psyche selber ihre Hülle zerstört, wenn die Schwingen eines neuen, freyeren Daseyns sich in ihr entfalten. Ich habe in dem ersten Theil meiner schon angeführten Schrift, da wo ich von einem scheinbaren Streben der Dinge nach ihrer eignen Vernichtung gehandelt, in vielen Beyspielen gezeigt, dass gerade in der Gluth der seeligsten und am meisten erstrebten Augenblicke des Daseyns, dieses sich selber auflöset und zerstört. Es welkt die Blume sogleich, wenn der höchste Augenblick des Blühens vorüber ist, und das bunte Insekt sucht in der einen Stunde der Liebe zugleich die seines Todes, und empfängt in dem Tempel der Hochzeit selber sein Grab. Ja es sind bey dem Menschen gerade die seeligsten und geistigsten Augenblicke des Lebens, für dieses selber die zerstörendsten, und wir finden öfters in dem höchsten und heiligsten Streben unsres Wesens, einen seeligen Untergang.65

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65 It is an eternal law of nature, and one so evidently clear, that the human mind needs to be made conscious of it, that the transitory form of things perishes when a new, higher striving awakes in them, and that it is not time, not the eternal world, but the psyche that breaks free, when the wings of a new and freer existence unfold in it. I have shown with many examples from the first part of my already quoted publication, in the section dealing with a seeming urge of things towards their destruction, that in the very glowing heat of the most blissful moment, the object of the highest striving, this dissolves and destroys itself. The flower fades in the very highest moment of its flowering, the shiny insect seeks in the one hour of love that of its death, and receives in the nuptial temple its own grave. With humans it is the very highest blissful and spiritual moments that are for them the most destructive,

So erschienen Liebe und Tod, das seeligste Streben des Gemüths und der Untergang des Individuums vereint.67

So ist in allen jenen Mysterien, der Tod und die Liebe, der Untergang und die Wiedererneuerung der Dinge, zu Einem Bild vereint, dargestellt worden.68

So ist es ein Hauptinhalt der meisten Mysterien und heiligen Sagen, dass der Tod aus der Liebe, Untergang des Individuellen aus dem höchsten Streben der Seele hervorgingen. Hiermit verliert der Tod seine Schrecken, und es erscheint in ihm der Moment, wo jene höheren Organe, jene höheren Kräfte, die wir während des Lebens vergeblich erstrebt haben, in uns durch die Flamme eines grossen Augenblicks erweckt werden. Als dann wird der Psyche diese Hülle zu enge, es vergeht diese Form, damit eine neue höhere aus ihr wiederkehre.69

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66 ‘From earliest times there has been a law that unites the highest moments of life as one with death, the secret of love and death, the hope of continuing life forever, and the consolation for the loss of a past both ancient and great. For this reason the mysteries of the Egyptians and of Eleusis were taken to refer to the history of ancient times, and the initiates were granted the certainty of life continuing after death. The image in which death appeared in the mysteries was pleasant and sweet rather than terrible, and the initiation was therefore praised as a means against the fear of death. Indeed the dying and those who died in pious faith were assisted in their passing into a new existence’. Ibid., 71f.

67 ‘Thus love and death, the most blissful striving of the mind and individual’s end, seemed united’. Ibid., 73.

68 ‘Thus, in all these mysteries, death and love, the end and the renewal of things, was represented as one image’. Ibid., 76.

69 ‘Thus it is a major component of most mysteries and sacred lays that death proceeds from love, the end of the individual out of the highest strivings of the soul. Thus,
Schubert is also able to fuse his important notions of animal magnetism with the above:

Ueberhaupt ist es diese Verwandtschaft des thierischen Magnetismus mit dem Tode, welche die vorzüglichste Aufmerksamkeit verdient. Die Natur hebt solche sonst unheilbaren Krankheiten, die nur dem Magnetismus weichen, durch den Tod, und giebt so durch eine vollkommene Umwandlung, der kranken menschlichen Natur die verlohrne innre Harmonie zurück. Der Magnetismus, welcher nicht selten ein Erstarren der Glieder wie im Tode, und andre hiermit verwandten Symptome zur ersten Wirkung hat, ist auch hierin das im Kleinen, was der Tod im Grossen und auf eine vollkommnere Weise ist.

We can distil from these quotations the following points: that the self-destruction of the psyche in the blissful moment of death is the natural transition to new life, indeed that all religious mysteries and mystical beliefs are based on this awareness of ‘ein neues Daseyn durch die heilige Weihe’; that this is indeed a ‘Naturgesetz’ which enables humans to find a ‘Trost über das frühe Versinken des alten Glücks’. We find in fact a different, more comforting, more reassuring perception of the word ‘metamorphosis’ than our previous examinations of this notion allowed us to entertain. For there are those, says Schubert, who in the moment of death receive the utterance denied them in life, a ‘striving’ so much in contradiction with the rest of their existence, ‘dass wir noch fast an der Gränze des Lebens eine höhere Metamorphose ihres Wesen eintreten sehen’.

If we for a moment relate these passages to *Penthesilea*, we find the following. That the heroine, caught in an inhumane system, inimical to

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70 ‘Generally it is this relationship of animal magnetism with death that deserves the utmost attention. Nature annuls maladies, otherwise incurable and only accessible through animal magnetism, through death, and thus through the complete transformation affected in human nature’s malady it restores the inner harmony that was lost. Magnetism, whose first effect so often is to paralyse the limbs as in death, and other related symptoms, is thus on a small scale what death is on a large scale and in a more perfect form’. Ibid., 357.

71 ‘A new existence through a higher consecration’. Ibid., 72.

72 ‘Natural law’; ‘consolation for the early loss of its former happiness’. Ibid., 80.

73 ‘That almost on the brink of life we see a higher metamorphosis of its being’. Schubert, *Ansichten*, 319.
the feeling which would free her for a higher existence and fulfilment of her personality, feels, in a manner unable to be articulated in words, the bliss of imminent death in those very moments when her imaginings are most obsessively engaged with Achilles. They run, sometimes linked with the image of the unattainable sun-god, through all the main strands of the action.

Doch taub schien sie der Stimme der Vernunft.\textsuperscript{74}

Ach, meine Seel ist matt bis in den Tod!\textsuperscript{75}

Da liegt er mir zu Füssen ja! Nimm mich –
Sie will in den Fluss sinken\textsuperscript{76}

Ich will in ewge Finsternis mich bergen!\textsuperscript{77}

Zum Entzücken! [...] Bin ich in Elysium?\textsuperscript{78}

Ich bin so selig, Schwester! Überselig!
Ganz reif zum Tod o Diana, fühl ich mich!\textsuperscript{79}

Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los,
Und folge diesem Jüngling hier\textsuperscript{80}

Denn jetzt steig ich in meinen Busen nieder\textsuperscript{81}

The images in the play which might run counter to this passivity, those of stoic acceptance (the arch) or of heroic grandeur (the oak) are significantly not Penthesilea’s own, but Prothoe’s. They are a commentary on the tragic greatness of the heroine who stands and falls while ‘tücksche Götter uns die Hand [führen]’.\textsuperscript{82} Penthesilea herself must experience the constant draw of death as the consequence of her attraction to Achilles, must metamorphose herself and her

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} ‘But deaf she seemed to reason’s voice’. \textit{SW}, I, 1074.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} ‘Ah, my spirit is heavy unto death’. Ibid., 1237.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} ‘There he lies at my feet, Yes, take me –
  She makes to sink into the river’. Ibid., 1388.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} ‘In everlasting darkness I will hide’. Ibid., 2351.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} ‘O transport! Am I in Elysium?’ Ibid., 284f.
  \item \textsuperscript{79} ‘I am so blissful, sister, more than bliss!
  Ripe unto death, o Diana, is how I feel’. Ibid., 2864f.
  \item \textsuperscript{80} ‘I free myself from the women’s law
  And follow this young hero here’. Ibid., 3012f.
  \item \textsuperscript{81} ‘And now descend down into my bosom’. Ibid., 3025.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} ‘Fickle gods guide our hand’. Ibid., 2890.
\end{itemize}
lover into animals, pursuer and pursued, before the ecstatic vision of ‘höhere Metamorphose’ is granted to her. There is no clear suggestion that she enters into a higher existence with Achilles in death, only that in metamorphosis and death, she gains the sense, the feeling of fulfilment, as if their deaths were indeed a union of body and soul, a vision of the dignity of existence which divine malevolence otherwise denies her. Only in this sense of a changed state of mind, induced by a frenzied longing for love in death, can Penthesilea’s ‘metamorphosis’ be transfigured from the bleakest, starkest of tragedies into a tragedy where vision and intimation open the inner eye to paradisal, blissful states not granted to humans in time and space but in hope and dream. In this we see also a thematic sequence which leads from Kleist’s Marionettentheater/Marionette Theatre to Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. We see, too, the thematic continuity of the motif of physical unconsciousness, of fainting or psychic disturbance, which accompanies the moment of ‘Ahndung’, intuition, in so many of Kleist’s works — independent of Schubert or any other source.

If Penthesilea, then, ends on a note of loss, but also of glimpsed vision, it also has affinities with the theories of tragedy published in extract by Adam Müller in Phöbus. One thinks especially of his chapter, ‘Vom religiösen Character der griechischen Bühne’, in which he adumbrates those moments of tragic experience which lead, ladder-like, to a higher existence: ‘Auferstehungsmoment’, ‘höherer Todesmoment’, ‘Himmelfahrtsmoment’. The analogy is interesting and has been pursued before, indeed the evidently Christian connotations of Müller’s categories for Greek tragedy are no contradiction in times when Zacharias Werner postulates a higher fusion of Schiller and Pedro Calderón, and Müller himself invokes Goethe’s classicizing elegy ‘Euphrosyne’. To Kleist wrestling with Sophocles and Shakespeare, such ‘Romantic’ connotations of tragedy might well lend themselves. Yet we remember Müller’s own words to Friedrich Gentz, which warn us against the pursuit of too close a parallel with Tieck’s, the Schlegels’ or Werner’s practice. There is no heaven for Penthesilea, none of the

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85 Cf. Brown, Kleist and the Tragic Ideal, 44ff.
‘Unvergänglichkeit und Himmel’,\textsuperscript{86} of which Müller’s \textit{Phöbus} lecture speaks and which is the tacit understanding behind Schubert’s ‘Ahndung’. Rather, we might quote Müller’s words:

Welches Heilige man nicht auf würdige Weise zu entschleiern vermag, sollte man, sagt’ ich in der vorigen Stunde, lieber verschleiert lassen: dieser mir selbst gegebenen Vorschrift folge ich, der ich den Verdacht des Mysticismus scheue, und würde dennoch stolz darauf sein, durch das bisher gesagte, in manchem Mitgliede dieser verehrungswürdigen Versammlung, eine Ahndung erweckt zu haben, wie nemlich die Tragödie auch bei uns zu dem erhoben werden könnte, was sie bei den Griechen war, zum religiösen Fest.\textsuperscript{87}

Yet one other contributor to \textit{Phöbus}, Wilhelm Nienstädt, the now-forgotten author of the essay ‘Von der didaktischen Poesie’,\textsuperscript{88} did see fit to link his remarks with Schubert. Nienstädt’s remarks are less heady than Müller’s, more concerned with the actual dichotomies of poetry and life, more reflective of the national penchant ‘Jegliches zuvor inwendig zu verarbeiten, ehe man ihm nach aussen Gestaltung giebt’, conscious of the perils of ‘Innerlichkeit’ if poetry is to be truly ‘didaktisch’, that is, expressive of the ‘harmonischer Staat’ and not merely ‘luftiges Gebilde’. Schubert, says Nienstädt, is ‘wahrhaftig zeitmässig und didaktisch’ and affords us insight into a future union of the subjective and the objective.\textsuperscript{89} Further words of Nienstädt would, however, seem more apposite to \textit{Penthesilea}:

In einem Zeitalter daher, wo man immer tiefer und mit immer neu aufgeregteter Begier dem Unendlichen nachforscht, zugleich aber auch immer klarer der eignen Freiheit, der Höhe und Tiefe des Geistes inne wird, muss auf jener Seite die Freude am Unvergänglichen auf dieser das Vorgefühl des Besitzes sich vor andern kund thun, wie davon das

\textsuperscript{86} ‘Imperishability and heaven’.
\textsuperscript{87} ‘Whatever sacred mystery that cannot be unveiled in seemly fashion we should rather leave veiled; as I said in the previous lecture. I follow this self-imposed ordinance, shying away from all suspicion of mysticism, but would still be proud if my previous words had kindled in some members of this worthy assembly an inkling of how tragedy in our land could be elevated to the status it enjoyed under the Greeks, a religious festival’. Müller, ‘Vom religiösen Character’, 9.-10. Stück, 5.
\textsuperscript{88} ‘On Didactic Poetry’.
\textsuperscript{89} ‘To go through everything inwardly before giving it an external shape’; ‘inwardness’; ‘harmonious state’; ‘airy substance’; ‘truly fit for our times and didactic’. Müller, ‘Vom religiösen Character’, 8. Stück, 27.
Lyrische in unsern Poesien Zeuge ist. Was hülfte es dem Menschen auch alles jenes, wenn es nicht mit seiner unergründlichen Natur vereinbart und unter den Menschen eingebürgert würde, wie es nur die Poesie vermag?\textsuperscript{90}

In \textit{Penthesilea}, it is only ‘Poesie’, the moment of higher imagining and perception, that affords possession (‘Besitz’). But that possession is never real outside the inner sphere; it is the creation of ‘Poesie’, a ‘Begier nach dem Unendlichen’,\textsuperscript{91} but one that human social and political reality can only thwart and frustrate. The ‘metamorphosis’ into the mythical reality of Actaeon and Agaue is the only means of breaking — with ferocious tragic violence — out of a world ruled by capricious gods of evil intent. Yet the Schubertian metamorphosis ‘an der Gränze des Lebens’\textsuperscript{92} is no less ‘Poesie’. It is the glimpse of paradise, of prelapsarian harmony and knowledge, given to fragile humanity, yet also taken away in the demands and limitations of existence:

\begin{quote}
Ach! Wie gebrechlich ist der Mensch, ihr Götter!\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

As an ideal, however, it receives dignity by the very desire to reach out into spheres not troubled by human imperfection and frailty:

\begin{quote}
Sie sank, weil sie zu stolz und kräftig blühte!\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

As a ‘mythological’ tragedy, but also as the tragedy of personal relationships, \textit{Penthesilea} is a witness to Kleist’s powers of metamorphosis. Indeed, as in his play the man becomes the sacrificial victim and the woman is transformed into the Bassarid, Kleist may have recognized that myth has less to do with the clarity of Apollo than with the darker urges of which in our own day Robert Graves speaks:

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{90}] ‘In an age, therefore, that is so intently searching after the infinite, but at the same time is with greater clarity conscious of its own freedom and the heights and depths of the spirit, there must above all on the one hand be joy in things imperishable, on the other the expression of a possession yet to be gained, to which the lyrical part of our poetry bears witness. What would all this avail mankind if it were not joined with its unfathomable nature and was received among men, as only poetry is able?’ Ibid., 26.
\item [\textsuperscript{91}] ‘Desire for the infinite’.
\item [\textsuperscript{92}] ‘On the brink of life’.
\item [\textsuperscript{93}] ‘O how fragile humans are, you gods!’ \textit{SW}, I, 3037.
\item [\textsuperscript{94}] ‘She sank, too proud and forceful was her flowering!’ Ibid., 3040.
\end{itemize}
Poetry began in the matriarchal age, and derives its magic from the moon, not from the sun. No poet can hope to understand the nature of poetry unless he has had a vision of the Naked King crucified to the lopped oak, and watched the dancers, red-eyed from the acrid smoke of the sacrificial fires, stamping out the measure of the dance, their bodies bent uncouthly forward, with a monotonous chant of: ‘Kill! kill! kill!’ and ‘Blood! blood! blood!’