

Georg Kaiser

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Georg Kaiser experienced his childhood and youth during the *Gründerzeit* (the time of economic and industrial expansion) and the Wilhelminian era, the period between the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the outbreak of World War I. Victorious in three wars, Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor," had finally united Germany by force in 1871 and had forged it into the dominant political power on the Continent. Now a belated industrial revolution, the rapid development of heavy industries and the progress of science, transformed an agrarian country into one of the leading modern industrial states. Sleepy towns, little changed since medieval times, blossomed into pulsating cities. A fever of productivity spread across the land, and gigantic firms were built up by economically far-sighted men like Borsig, Krupp, Ballin, Siemens, Zeiss, Daimler, and Benz. When Kaiser worked for the AEG (General Electric Company) in Argentina (1899-1901), it had more than thirty-five thousand employees and branch offices all over the world. Yet it had been started less than twenty years before in a small shop with six workers. Protected by high tariffs, the electrical, chemical, and textile industries, the machine factories, mining, iron, and steel industries in the Ruhr Valley and in upper Silesia grew at a rapid pace and were often united in vast cartels. The transportation system was expanded; railway lines were laid out all over Germany; new canals were constructed; harbors were built and enlarged; and shipping lines were extended to every corner of the world to compete for available markets abroad. With the development of the automobile, new roads had to be built, and soon the airplane began to make its first appearance.

All these industries needed workers: from the country the farmers and day laborers, the servant girls and younger sons and daughters of farmers and artisans trekked into the cities by the millions, seeking work in the factories. These people came in search of a better life, but they were often cruelly disappointed; wages were low and the hours long. To make ends meet, women and children often also had to work. Because housing was limited and new construction could not catch up with the increasing demand, many families lived in unsanitary conditions in cramped quarters, and their health suffered. Although Bismarck had introduced some social legislation between 1883 and 1889 to protect the workers against illness, disability caused by accidents, and old age, the families could not live a decent life on starvation wages. The repressive

Sozialistengesetz (law against Socialists), passed in 1878 and not repealed until 1890, also prohibited the workers from forming clubs or unions and even from printing newspapers or any other literature. Penalties for breaking the law were severe. It was impossible for the Socialists to exert any pressure for higher wages or better treatment, or even to acquaint the general public with their plight. Although, after a slight initial success, the law could not prevent the rise of the Social Democratic party, it caused much bitterness and hatred between the workers and the middle and upper classes.

The growth of the big industrial cities³ was paralleled by the growth of an impoverished industrial proletariat. The latter was increased by many formerly independent artisans who became workers in the factories when they could no longer compete with the new machines. The gray masses of workers became part of the picture of the cities.⁴ There was not only a movement from the country into the city. Society itself was in a state of flux, as members of the nobility founded firms or became partners in industrial enterprises while the landed aristocracy, despite its determined opposition in the *Reichstag*,⁵ lost much of its power after the passage of new tariff laws between 1891 and 1894 by Chancellor Caprivi. The nobility still exerted most of the political power and had almost a monopoly in decision-making, but the bourgeoisie grew in size and importance until it was both the most visible social group and the strongest economic power in Germany, controlling trade and manufacturing. Many small landowners and merchants moved from the country into the cities and started new firms or opened stores to furnish the workers with the necessities of life. They became part of the bourgeoisie, whose primary goal was social advancement and final acceptance by the nobility. Carl Sternheim satirically portrays this powerful desire for social improvement in his comedies *Bürger Schippel* and *Der Snob*, both published in 1913.

Georg Kaiser and most Expressionist writers grew out of this social class. Their parents had frequently risen from humble beginnings to the middle class, and they valued material prosperity and the good life. Since these values were guaranteed by the continued economic progress, they were well satisfied with the structure of society and ready to defend it. This attitude often degenerated into opposition to any innovation and a highly patriotic and nationalistic stance bolstered by the military victories of Germany in the recent

From 1885 on, Georg attended elementary school for three years and in 1888 entered the Gymnasium *Unserer Lieben Frauen*. Also in the same year, 1888, Wilhelm II, the last German emperor, ascended to the throne. Two years later he dismissed Bismarck, the man who had steered the political course of Germany for nearly thirty years. During the Bismarck era, only students of the *Gymnasia*, which emphasized the humanist tradition and the study of the classical languages, could enter the universities. It was not until the age of Wilhelm II that the secondary school system was modernized and that the students of *Realschulen*, which placed greater stress on the sciences and modern languages, obtained the right to continue their studies at the universities. The technical schools were also elevated to the rank of universities, since the new technological world needed men with a scientific education and specialized knowledge as well as humanists.

Kaiser's father probably wanted his son to go on to the university, but Georg soon developed an aversion to the discipline that was demanded by the teachers. The schools of that period were notorious for their highhanded treatment of the students and were only an extension of the established adult society bent on preserving the status quo. The students were to be educated to respect the authority of the teacher as a representative of the state. They were taught that the existing society was the best possible one and that its traditions, ethics, and mores had to be observed. The teachers themselves were often very narrow-minded and bigoted. They knew enough to be competent in their fields, but because of this limited competence they thought that they could be judges in all matters. From their students they demanded that they memorize the material presented in class and regurgitate it on demand; they neither expected nor wanted original or independent thinking. Instead they stressed obedience and discipline. Translations from the Latin and Greek and pedantic exercises in grammar and syntax were the rule, but not a word was uttered about the spirit and the meaning of the texts. Students often developed a hatred against all the literature presented in school, which explains the antipathy and violent outbursts of some of the Expressionists against classical German authors like Goethe and Schiller.

The influence of this kind of instruction on a sensitive and artistically gifted child like Kaiser, who showed his own initiative and thinking at an early age, was disastrous. He developed nervous

disorders and was frequently sick. In school he suffered from claustrophobia and frequently missed classes. Albrecht Kaiser relates:

Already as a child, my brother was a complicated individual, secretive and reserved against everybody, brooding and fantastic at the same time. He was a sworn enemy of all triviality, superficiality, baseness, immorality, but very susceptible to literature and art. He had a nervous constitution; as a student he very often suffered from serious nervous disorders; at the age of about 23, after his return from Buenos Aires, he was sick with malaria for a long time, and very often he was threatened by a nervous breakdown.⁸

He was nonconformist in school and did not have many friends among his classmates since he did not participate in their usual pastimes of drinking and smoking. These he considered bourgeois vices. His brother states: "I have the feeling that he detested every expression of the usual bourgeois thinking and behavior; spiritually he went his own ways."⁹ Georg tried to stand out from the crowd by dressing in a different and somewhat eccentric manner. It is not surprising that such an uncommunicative and withdrawn student did not become the favorite of his teachers:

Georg Kaiser was an exception among his brothers, who were known as outstanding students. This was not because the school caused him genuine difficulties, since he was really talented enough, it was rather he who caused difficulties for the school. Even as a sophomore it was impossible for him to follow the routine and adhere to the regular school discipline. His startling, caustic, and surprisingly humorous critiques of various human shortcomings of his teachers and his rebellion against the routine of the school were so pronounced that his will to work and his performance in school suffered. With the first certificate [*Einjährigel*] he threw off the shackles; he could not stand it any longer in school, and one had to let him go.¹⁰

Although he was a frail young man and his health was not the best, Georg participated in different sports that were then becoming popular. He especially loved soccer and bicycle riding. The latter sport found many adherents in the cities, where even ladies were taking to the wheels, although many people—among them the

Faust voices his hope that he will find a new love. Once more, Kaiser uses popular tunes for some of his songs. Wagner speaks the local Magdeburg dialect. The little play is neither very humorous nor very effective. It merely shows that Kaiser was a born versifier. The work was performed by the circle of friends on April 24, 1897. Plays of other dramatists, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, were also staged, with Kaiser directing some of them while acting in others.¹⁷

The plays of Georg Büchner, whose *Woyzeck* had been published in 1879 and who was only rediscovered by the Expressionists after the productions of this drama and *Leonce and Lena* in 1913, were already being read by these young people. In him they saw the prophet of a coming literature. The Scandinavians, extremely popular at the time and produced on most German stages—the liberal and didactic Björnsterne Björnson (1832-1910), Nobel Prize-winner in 1903, and the social critic and rebel Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)—also interested them. Ibsen's attacks against the narrow middle-class atmosphere, with its conventions and complacencies, and his call for ethical and social responsibility, deeply influenced the young and impressionable minds. Kaiser and his friends read *Brand* (1866) and even the early *Comedy of Love* (1862). When a theatrical company with a repertoire consisting entirely of Ibsen plays came to Magdeburg, Kaiser was especially impressed by *Rosmersholm* (1886).¹⁸ The third Scandinavian author read by the group was Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847-84). His realistic novels, *Frau Marie Grubbe* (1872) and *Niels Lyhne* (1880), had been translated a few years before and were quite popular.

The young men's greatest interest was centered around the development of German literature. During the two decades following 1870, the political power and economic prosperity of the Reich had not found its parallel in the field of literature. While other European literatures were exploring new territories—the novel in England, France, and Russia, drama in Scandinavia and Russia—German letters were stagnating. In the field of drama the situation was especially bleak. Grillparzer had died in 1872, and with him the last classical dramatist had left the stage. The plays published and performed between 1870 and 1890 are practically all unknown today.¹⁹ Only the Viennese *Volksstücke* of the Austrian Ludwig Anzengruber (1839-89) are still read.

But two writers who turned to the historical genre should be

mentioned: Adolf Wilbrandt (1837-1911) portrayed ancient Rome with great theatrical effect and brought Germanic heroes and heroines like Siegfried and Kriemhild to life again on the stage. Ernst von Wildenbruch (1845-1909), himself a member of the Hohenzollern family, became the minstrel for this dynasty. This "Schiller of Brandenburg," as he was called at the height of his fame, composed patriotic and heroic tragedies in blank verse in which he glorified the Prussia of Bismarck and Wilhelm I. These earned him the honor of being considered poet laureate of the new empire.²⁰ However, his characters are not developed, and the most that can be said of his dramas is that they mirror the atmosphere of the 1870's and 1880's.

These belated descendants of the *Ritterdramen* were ridiculed by the younger people; and one of the earliest poetic attempts of Kaiser is a satiric imitation of the first, third, and fourth acts of the first part of Wildenbruch's *Heinrich und Heinrichs Geschlecht* (Henry and Henry's Family, 1896). Kaiser's "happening on the stage"²¹ preserves the original structure but condenses the plot considerably. The original cast of thirty-two historical characters and innumerable extras in the pageant is cut down to seven principal actors and a few extras to represent the people. Kaiser changes the text completely. He preserves it only where it serves his satirical purpose, as when King Henry enters Worms and bombastically declares: "I am greeting love, I am greeting loyalty, I am greeting you, Worms!" or "The will of the king is the law of Germany!"²² Kaiser even inserts other pompous oratory in the style of Wilhelm II, who had been repeatedly attacked in magazines and newspapers for his undiplomatic and often bragging speeches, his inappropriate remarks on all and sundry occasions, his dilettantism, and his authoritarian tendencies. Because of his unsteady and wavering political course he was the butt of caricaturists and popular jokes.²³

Some of the knights in the play speak Berlin dialect, and their heroic sentiments are changed to trivial chatter. They are mostly interested in drinking and lead the people in songs added by Kaiser. At the end of each of the two parts of the play, the scene degenerates into a drinking bout in the style of a student *Kommers*. Kaiser reveals the true aim of Wildenbruch—the glorification of Prussia—by changing the character of King Henry IV. In the first part the latter appears as the ideal hero in medieval armor, in the second as an arrogant Prussian lieutenant dressed in a gray infantry coat with

dilemma of the Expressionists and their mission: they would have liked to save the world by establishing a new "religion" in order to hide the knowledge of the meaninglessness of man's existence of nihilism, from mankind, but they also reveal it. The contradictory actions are caused by a schizophrenic state of mind. Just as Athens is destroyed in spite of Sokrates' sacrifice, so the Expressionists' vision could not save modern society, nor divert it from its suicidal course. What did Kaiser do when he recognized this fact? He turned away from life and escaped into the spheres of the spirit, accepting the isolation this entailed. He no longer used the metaphor of the "unholy in the flesh" with its negative meaning; for him, the intellect was no longer a sickness but "the highest development of energy in nature."⁷¹ and the source of his talents. In 1928 he said in an interview, "I discovered the highest form of health—spiritual health, in Plato's sense—that same Plato to whom I dedicated my earliest passion and whom I determined to follow—here, today, more strongly than ever before."⁷² But although he still maintained that the intellect was the force which could give shape to the chaotic world and determine the course of history, in many of his plays he elevated it into the realm of the stars, thereby severing any connections to the world of reality and losing the chance to apply his reason to the problems of existence waiting for solutions.

CHAPTER 5

The Vision of a New Man: The Expressionist Plays

IN the years between 1910 and the beginning of World War I, an ominous atmosphere pervaded Europe. Social and political crises were becoming more frequent and more pronounced. In the big cities, recurring strikes gave evidence of worker dissatisfaction, while the clashes between the European power blocs in Africa and the Balkan countries threatened the peace and the balance of power in Europe. The German government proved inept at dealing with these difficulties, and a mood of impending catastrophe found its expression in many of the literary products of the time, like Georg Heym's book of poetry *Der ewige Tag* (The Eternal Day, 1911), Ernst Stadler's collections of poems *Der Aufbruch* (The New Beginning, 1911), Carl Hauptmann's *Krieg* (War, 1912), Carl Sternheim's play *1913* (1914), and Heinrich Mann's novel *Der Untertan* (The Vassal, written in 1914).

The common denominator of all these works is their intensified cultural criticism, a rejection of the present state of society, and a longing for a change even if it became a storm that would cause destruction but would clear the air. Writers revolted against the cultural and political manifestations of their age and, with youthful enthusiasm, envisioned a regeneration of mankind and the building of a new world. This revolt against the old standards and values in politics and the arts was soon given the name Expressionism and was conducted by young artists most of whom were born around 1890. In pamphlets and new periodicals with the telling names *Die Aktion*, *Der Sturm*, and *Revolution*, all founded in 1910, they expressed their concern about the problems of the day and, in contrast to Naturalism, tried to present answers and solutions, impractical and subjective though they might be. Even if their criticism did not always include a program of how to combat society's maladies, new social and ethical ideas were implied. With their visions of a doomed and destroyed world, the Expressionists wanted to shock the bour-

covering his tracks. Suddenly the sun is hidden, and a storm sweeps across the field. The snow forms a skeleton in the branches of a tree, which beckons him to follow.⁵ But he is not yet ready to come along; he wants to find out what he can do with his money and defiantly challenges death to return at midnight. He later explains the symbolism to his wife: the snowfield represents the cemetery of modern existence in which the living are buried under the snow and ice of conventional mores and habits. The storm has thawed out the Cashier and regenerated him. But death also threatens him if he should prove unable to master his new-found life.

The first part of the drama presents the Cashier's monotonous existence and the impetus (*Anstoß*) which causes his departure (*Aufbruch*) for a new goal. He wants to purchase a new lease on life: "Where are the goods which one can buy with a total pledge? With sixty thousand—and the whole buyer with skin and bones?!" (Shouting) You must supply me—you must give value for value!!!⁶ He is on his way; and in the second part he passes through four stations in his search for something which will justify the step he has taken. It is a race between his "flight" from his old life, from the police, and from waiting death, and the "march" to a better future. * His first visit is to his family consisting of his wife, two daughters, and his old mother. He relates his experiences, but they do not comprehend the change he has undergone. Their lives revolve around their daily meals, needlework, and the playing of music by Wagner. The Cashier rejects the routine and triviality of this conventional existence after having a last look at his slippers, long pipe, and nightcap—the typical utensils of the German philistine. So habit ridden is the mother that the shock of hearing her son leave before lunch kills her, but her death does not detain him. Leaving the little town W(eimar), the Cashier tries his luck in the big city B(erlin). He is in an arena watching a six-day bicycle race. First he offers a prize of one thousand marks, then of fifty thousand. He is not interested in the sport itself but only in the ecstatic reactions of the audience. He desires passionate life, and, since he cannot live it himself, he wants to experience it vicariously. "Humanity. Free humanity. High and low human beings. No ranks—no strata—no classes. Pushing into infinity—dismissed from slavery and drudgery into passion."⁷ But again his plans are frustrated: the Crown Prince enters, the national anthem is played, and everybody stands at attention. Tradition proves stronger than passion and ecstasy.

The third station is a cabaret where the Cashier has his first taste of the high life. He orders only the best and tries to win the most beautiful girls, but the first gets drunk and falls asleep, the next two are old and ugly, and the swirling dancer has a wooden leg. Disgusted, he smashes the ice bucket over her head. As she runs for help, he quickly slips away. The gentlemen who have been called by the dancer steal the money he has left for the waiter who, in desperation, wants to commit suicide; having been unemployed for four months, he cannot refund the money. The scene throws the gentlemen's cruelty, inhumanity, and hardheartedness into relief, but the treatment the Cashier metes out to the poor girl is equally ruthless and brutal.

In the arena and in the dance hall, a girl from the Salvation Army had already tried to sell the hero her tract. Now she leads him to the meeting place, where he listens to the confessions of a soldier, always followed by one of the audience with similar experiences. A racing champion, a prostitute, a family father, and a clerk tell how they have wasted their lives. The Cashier realizes that their sins are his own. He climbs onto the podium and denounces himself and the money: "With all the money from the banks of the world one can't buy something of value. One always gets less than one pays for. And the more one pays, the more inferior the goods become. Money degrades the value. Money hides the true value—money is the cheapest deception among all frauds."⁸ He throws the bills into the hall. But instead of disregarding them, soldier and penitents alike engage in a wild struggle and leave. The Cashier is alone with the girl. In her he sees his last hope: together they will return to paradise and start a new life protected from the world in a garden of Eden. But she betrays him to a policeman for the reward offered. Visualizing death sitting on the lamp, the Cashier shoots himself. He sinks against the cross of the curtain and dies with the words "Ecce homo" on his lips. This has generally been regarded as an allusion to the passion of Christ. But the Cashier who is trying to achieve self-realization without regard for others, cannot be compared to Christ who died for all mankind. The Cashier never wastes a thought on the feelings or troubles of his family, the waiter, or the man who is killed during the bicycle race. Adling has drawn attention to Nietzsche's autobiographical book, *Ecce homo* (1888), where the philosopher contrasts the Christian ideals with his own philosophy of the superman.⁹ By attempting to reach Dionysiac ecstasy and a

technique of constructing a play from Strindberg, whose dramas portray the frustrated and isolated individual (actually an image of his own self) on his way through an alienated world. Strindberg also uses supernatural scenes, where the plane of reality is left behind, like the scenes in the snowfield and the Salvation Army hall in Kaiser's play. The scenery and the stage settings are also important since they take on symbolic value and underline the spoken word. The snowfield and the cross have already been mentioned. The money has a functional value, but it also symbolizes the spirit of a capitalistic society where all values are measured by it.

In *Von morgens bis mitternachts* Kaiser successfully portrays an empty life and the attempt to break out of its vicious circle. Bruno Werner, using the title of the play as the subtitle of his book about the 1920's, wrote: "Georg Kaiser's stage direction stylistically corresponds to the style of language at the beginning of the twenties, thematically it shows the twenties itself."¹⁴ The play was recommended by Otto Zoff to Otto Falckenberg, director of the Munich Kammerspiele. He produced it with great success on April 28, 1917, with Kaiser attending the premiere. During the following years, it was accepted by almost all famous theaters and was produced all over the world.¹⁵ It was considered Kaiser's best play,¹⁶ a judgment still valid today since the conditions on which it is based still exist and probably will always exist in a modern society, even in an aggravated form. With its description of the two sides of life, the monotony of work and the lighter pleasures, its swift dialogue and sardonic humor, it should enthrall any receptive audience and provide a challenge to actors as well as to an imaginative director.

The tragicomedy *Kanzlist Krehler*¹⁷ is generally considered an appendix to *Von morgens bis mitternachts*. Kenworthy states that it "extends to three acts the theme of the short domestic scene"¹⁸ in the latter play. This creates the impression that Kaiser was trying to repeat the success of the former play by writing a similar one. But this is not the case. To be sure, the starting point is the same in both dramas: Krehler is also suddenly thrown out of his accustomed existence when he receives an unexpected day off after his daughter Ida's wedding. But here the similarity ends. The Cashier runs from station to station, looking for a new life and finally shoots himself because the world is not as he imagined it to be. He blames it for his failure, never realizing that it was his own inner lack of substance

The Vision of a New Man

which caused his destruction. The clerk Krehler, on the other hand, has time to have a good, hard look at himself and comes to the conclusion that he will never be able to start a new life. The structure and the setting of the play are tailored to its purpose: *Kanzlist Krehler* is not a *Stationendrama* but a conventional family tragedy in three acts and, therefore, takes place in Krehler's apartment. Krehler and his daughter Ida are contrasted with his wife and son-in-law Max. A globe takes on symbolic value and is of great importance in the play.

The alienated Krehler comes home and is completely lost.¹⁹ Since he has never had a free Monday, he has no idea of what to do. His life has been completely devoted to his duty and family; every day he has worked in the office so that his wife and daughter might have an easier life. He has saved money for their birthdays and holidays, for Ida's dowry and even for the costs of his own future funeral. This planned life is suddenly disrupted by a simple incident. Only when his daughter Ida, who has just spent her wedding night with Max, comes to visit him, does he see a way out. She also had the same experience of having lost her orientation, but she considers it a positive start into a new life. Her great love makes her feel at home with everybody; she is the world: "I am spinning playfully—the globe is spinning quicker to show everything. I am the globe—with green seas and blue countries—it's me!"²⁰ She confuses the colors, but it does not matter. The globe symbolizes her inner freedom. She is young and still has her life ahead of her. Krehler, on hearing her, is infected by her enthusiasm and decides to act. He wants to leave his job, discover the world, and develop his potential. "Start—and, wandering through the city, reconstruct the view of the world, until our globe rotates with all green seas and blue countries. Forward!"²¹ But instead of simply starting, he goes out and buys a globe because he first wants to study the "basic principles" of geography. He sees the globe as a model of the earth, but he also looks at it as a symbol for every human being: "A human being you are—completely here, completely there. Made to perfection. Look here: continents. For you. Look there: oceans. For you. You with water, air, earth, are a sphere. A totality."²² Krehler is now determined to break out of his limited and stagnant existence, to give up all claims to a pension and start a new life. Naturally his wife, seeing the globe only as a decoration for her apartment, resists. But Krehler does not listen to her protestations

Lu and the Pawnbroker. His next station is the casino, which Neumann had also mentioned in the letter. Since he is dressed in pawned pieces, he is arrested when a fur coat he wears turns out to be stolen. In the police station, he begs the sergeant to use the whole apparatus the police has at its disposal to track down Lu. But his proposal is mocked. The police are governed by a negative morality and protect only people who are actually threatened.

The Pawnbroker loses his license, and with it his means of livelihood, because he has used pawned pieces. He locks himself in his room, opens the gas, and dies, together with his daughter. But he is not embittered: "I listened to the voice of my neighbor—to which the others refused to give attention—I heard it! My deafness was healed—I was able to hear with both ears!—Shall they be closed again in my future life?"²⁹ He vindicates his action with the words: "To have started out to help a stranger!—In that lies the meaning and consummation of my adventure!"³⁰ He compares himself to a fool, but in Expressionist drama it is more often the fool who tells the truth than the rational man.³¹ His sacrifice is not invalidated by the fact that all he did was basically useless, as is made clear in the subplots. However, his suicide is an escape into death, indicative of the intellectual's refusal to tackle the problems of society, while strong men like Neumann direct social forces without regard to social welfare, into channels leading to anarchism and, ultimately, to a takeover by the Nazis.

The auxiliary Lu plot shows her visiting her sister. Neumann had actually written the letter a second time, since he realized that he had forgotten to mail it. But Lu falls in love with a friend of her brother-in-law, Franz Krüger. When she tells him of her misfortune with Neumann, he forgives her, and they marry. The Neumann plot presents his phenomenal rise in the world of business. He not only becomes the manager of a film company but also wins the admiration and the attentions of a beautiful star. Both he and Lu achieve their particular kind of happiness.

The Pawnbroker, Luise, and Neumann never meet knowingly. The three strands of the play are connected only by Neumann's letter, which is read aloud in all three scenes of the first act. For the Pawnbroker, who has actually earned his money by coldly exploiting other people's misery during the inflation, the letter is the impetus which changes his outlook and sends him on his way. His egoism is suddenly transformed to altruism, as he sacrifices everything for a human

being virtually unknown to him. He is a truly regenerated man. The following first scenes of each act are the stations to his Golgotha. He covers much of the same ground as the Cashier in *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, but, in contrast, he acts for unselfish and humanitarian reasons and not in order to amuse himself. It is also significant that only the characters who come into contact with him are designated as Expressionist types: Pawnbroker, Daughter, Gentleman, Commissioner.

The plot concerning Luise is a harmless love affair between a fallen but basically decent and innocent girl and a conventional young man. It takes place in the idyllic surroundings of the country far from the hectic and ruthless activities of the modern city. This romantic and sentimental melodrama emphasizes the fate of the Pawnbroker by contrast.

The Neumann plot is written in the manner of Carl Sternheim. The main character is also, as his name indicates, a "new man," but *not* in the Expressionist sense: he is one of the vital, amoral, and egotistical bourgeois citizens who claw their way to the top of the business world. His relationship to Sternheim's Maske family is also evidenced by his willingness to efface himself, become a nobody (*Niemand*) if the situation calls for it.

Although the dialogue in the three parts of the drama is indicative of the three spheres, Kaiser would have done well to differentiate it even more. The contrast between the three worlds can also be emphasized by the stage settings. For the premiere in Berlin on November 3, 1923, the set had been designed by George Grosz, and the individual scenes occupied the whole stage. But it is also possible to present a panoramic view by dividing the stage into three sections,³² which should be lighted up successively. The middle one is designated for the Pawnbroker plot; the right and left, for the Luise and Neumann plots, respectively.

The play was the first really popular success for Kaiser.³³ It is indeed a vivid and successful portrayal of a period whose maxim is best expressed by the police sergeant: "The general motto should be: everybody against everybody—knock out!"³⁴ Indeed, it was the Neumann plot which was wildly applauded, while the Pawnbroker's tragedy was considered Kaiser's parody of his own *Hölle Weg Erde* and did not excite the audience, for by 1923 the Expressionistic era was already drawing to its close.

Hölle Weg Erde has often been hailed as Kaiser's only positive

he is now able to influence others. The first to accept his guidance are an escaped convict and a prostitute who has murdered her last customer. He tells them that they will only find true freedom in prison, and they return to their cells. He again visits the jeweler, the lawyer, the prison officials, and the owner of the hotel where Lili and Edith are staying; all accuse the system. Having had time to think about Spazierer's earlier action, they have come to understand their own selfishness. They feel both guilty and innocent, being victims of society, but all are willing to give up their old lives and start anew.

In the last part of the play, they all are on the road to a better existence. They cross a bridge and liberate the prisoners. On a stony plain, under the warm morning sun, they are going to build a new society. Spazierer, until then their leader, now is only one among them, and his mighty voice sounds the last words: "Your blood surges—for you are the earth!"⁴⁰ Regenerated man is going to establish his paradise on earth, and not in heaven.

Spazierer passes through various stations on his path to a new world. In the first, the functionalism and inhumanity of a mechanistic society are represented. When told by Spazierer about his friend's plight, Lily only answers: "I don't know the man."⁴¹ For the war-torn, the prisoners are not human beings but only figures matching a red identity card. As far as the state is concerned, a man exists only if he comes into conflict with the law. The lawyer's clients are interested only in money, and he himself behaves like a machine: "I am a robot who applies the existing laws."⁴²

Spazierer's criminal action—the attempted murder of the jeweler—awakens the moral sense of these people. When he visits them a second time, they all have changed. They recognize that they are responsible for each other and that nobody is exempt from guilt. How this change comes about, or how the new world is going to function Kaiser does not tell us. The secret remains shrouded in a "misty fog."⁴³ Kenworthy explains that Kaiser is not worried about the actual details of the new community of the reformed and purified: "Kaiser has no blue-print of the future society to offer; but this is unimportant to him beside the urgent need for an initial change of heart."⁴⁴ "The awakening is the goal."⁴⁵ Spazierer asserts. This coincides with Kaiser's assertion of the priority of the regeneration of man, automatically followed by a regeneration of society. But even the regeneration of the individual is not convincing in this

play. Following the January 20, 1920, production at the Berlin Lessing Theater under the direction of Victor Barnowsky—with an effective stage setting by César Klein—Herbert Jhering called the play an unconvincing and empty "drama of words,"⁴⁶ and Kaiser himself later realized the shortcomings of *Hölle Weg Erde*.⁴⁷ It is, indeed, one of his weakest plays. Like Jhering, one gets the feeling that Kaiser himself did not believe in his own words. He uses his usual stage symbolism; the language is as mechanistic and impersonal as its speakers, but it does not change in the last part of the play, where it should convey to us the ecstasy and totality of a new world. *Hölle Weg Erde* and *Gas II*, written about the same time, give the impression of being exercises in symmetry rather than dramas. If the play is to show the birth of a new ethical responsibility, a moral awakening and regeneration, this aim gets lost in an ocean of words. It only demonstrates the failure of abstract language to convince and change people.

The four *Wandlungsdramen* discussed present a picture of society in which man is merely an economic factor. It is possible and even probable that the Cashier's and Krehler's work is of value to society, but to them it is only routine and void of any meaning. It has denatured them and left them floundering in the vacuum of a senseless world: they are truly alienated. Discovering the limitations of their existence, they rebel against the society which has condemned them to such a life. But they are too weak to fight successfully. Their cry of rage soon turns into a death rattle which cuts short their protests. The Pawnbroker and Spazierer, however, are creatures of conscience who try to assist their fellow men. Their criticism of society is not purely emotional; they attack specific ills, such as the ideal of abstract justice which does not serve the individual the way it should. They force society to review its values. While the Pawnbroker gives up, Spazierer finally reaches his utopia. In all cases, the impetus is a basically insignificant event, and the decision to help is an instinctive and emotional reaction. The characters strive not so much for a reform of society, but they really want to reform human nature and create a world in which love is possible, in which egoism is replaced by altruism. Kaiser seems to believe in the basic goodness of man, which has been perverted by society and must only be rediscovered.