

KEPLER'S TRIAL

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE: KEPLER'S DREAM

Kepler's literary creation, the Daemon of Levania, reads Kepler's fictional account of a healer mother, gifted with the power of flight.

SCENE 1: THE AMTSHAUS IN LEONBERG

Townfolk drink in the Amtshaus as a madrigal celebrates 'good Rhenish wine'. Their jollity is disrupted when Ursula Reinbold drunkenly approaches Governor Einhorn to accuse her neighbour, Katharina Kepler, of being a witch. After Ursula tries to substantiate her claim with the tale of Katharina's son, Heinrich, who was the first to call her a witch, the Governor resolves to 'thoroughly investigate'. Night falls and further rumours spread as the community sings a chorale.

SCENE 2: KATHARINA ALONE

Katharina sings a rhyme that depicts the seven ages of womankind, ending with the line, 'At seventy, barren and grown cold.' News of Ursula's accusation has left her shivering with fear as she contemplates what the future may hold. She sings a prayer, calling on God to 'come riding' to her aid.

FIRST INTERLUDE: THE ARREST

Katharina is arrested, formally charged and committed for trial.

SCENE 3: WITNESSES FOR THE PROSECUTION

The trial is underway. The village schoolmaster hobbles to the stand to accuse Katharina of making him lame with her herbal potions. Next, the court hears evidence from Dorothea Klebl, the marksman's wife, who reports what she heard some years ago from a seamstress who used to sew for Frau Kepler. Katharina supposedly once woke the girl at midnight and tried to tempt her to become a witch, responding to her qualms with a cynical dismissal of religion. The chorus demand that these 'heresies must be condemned'.

SCENE 4: KEPLER ALONE

Kepler has travelled from Linz to assist his mother and arrives to find the legal situation deteriorating alarmingly. He laments the abuse of the law and the despair that daily ages and weakens his mother's once formidable strength and determination.

SCENE 5: THE PRISON CELL

Katharina sings a psalm while the prison guards discuss the latest local witch to be executed. Kepler comes to visit his mother and they talk. Kepler seeks an explanation for one of the most damning pieces of evidence, that Katharina once asked the gravedigger to procure her the skull of her father. Exhausted, Katharina ends the conversation, telling him that he will know better than her 'what's to be done with the skull'.

SECOND INTERLUDE: THE COMET

Katharina sleeps and dreams of a time when she took the six-year-old Johannes to see the great comet of 1577.

SCENE 6: JUDGEMENT

As day dawns on the final day of the trial, the chorus sings a chorale. The chief prosecutor, Gabelkhover, sums up the case against Katharina. Invoking her dead father and son, Heinrich, he suggests that from 'the grave they testify against her.' Kepler attempts to counter this attack by portraying her as a tender daughter and mother, but Gabelkhover argues that the astronomer 'upends reality', telling the court that he 'would have you see the world as if you stood upon the moon'. He goes on to use Katharina's failure to weep as further evidence of her guilt. The magistrate announces that the case will be decided by the Tübingen Law Professors. They sing a madrigal in which they pronounce sentence of *territio verbalis*: the executioner will show Katharina the instruments of torture. Continuing to protest her innocence, she sings the Lord's Prayer.

EPILOGUE: KEPLER AND THE DAEMON

The Daemon describes how the voyage to space and to the Island of Levania is best undertaken by 'those wrinkled pinched old women' / from whom time squeezes / everything superfluous to flight: experienced in riding he-goats, / threadbare cloaks, forked sticks / and circuiting the globe by night'. Kepler observes, horrified as it dawns on him that his literary flight of fancy may have been responsible for the accusations against his mother. He determines to clip the Daemon's wings by offering rational explanations: 'footnotes to fetter you, / bibliographies that weigh enough / to drag you back to Earth.' As the Daemon disappears Kepler rededicates himself to continuing with his life's work.