

*Nineteenth-Century
Literature Criticism*

NCLC

146

Volume 146

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800
and 1899, from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations

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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

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NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

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An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting

those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Georg Büchner

1813-1837

(Full name Georg Karl Büchner) German playwright and novella writer.

The following entry presents criticism of Büchner from 1964 through 2001. For additional information on Büchner's life and career, see *NCLC*, Volume 26.

INTRODUCTION

Büchner is known for the few works he composed during his brief life: the novella fragment *Lenz* (1839) and the plays *Dantons Tod* (1835; *Danton's Death*), *Leonce und Lena* (1838; *Leonce and Lena*), and *Woyzeck* (first published in 1879). In these works Büchner rejected the idealism of the Romantic movement, which dominated German letters in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; instead, he sought to realistically depict what he saw as the hopelessness of life in a world where isolation, monotony, and suffering prevail and are perpetuated by deterministic historical and biological forces. This pessimistic view of life, along with the innovative techniques he used to obtain a sense of realism, gives Büchner a greater affinity with authors of the modern era than with those of the nineteenth century. Additionally, his link to several later developments in drama, among them Naturalism, the Theater of the Absurd, and Expressionism, has frequently been observed by scholars.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The eldest of six children, Büchner was born in Goddelau, Germany. His family moved in 1816 to nearby Darmstadt, the capital of the duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. During Büchner's school years his father, a physician, encouraged him to study the sciences, while his mother nurtured in him a love of literature and art. He left for France in 1831 to study medicine at the university in Strasbourg. At that time Strasbourg was a refuge for German liberals seeking asylum from the widespread political repression in the German states following the Napoleonic Wars. Because of a law requiring all Hessian students to attend a native institution for at least two years in order to receive a degree, however, Büchner returned to Hesse in 1833. He continued his studies at the university in Geissing and there became involved in radical politics. Early in 1834 he and some fellow



students founded an underground revolutionary group, the *Gesellschaft der Menschenrechte* ("Society for the Rights of Man"), whose aim was to reform the Hessian government and social structure. Shortly thereafter Büchner wrote a seditious pamphlet in collaboration with Friedrich Ludwig Weidig, an aging liberal devoted to revolutionary causes. The pamphlet, *Der Hessische Landbote* (1834; *The Hessian Courier*), was distributed secretly among Hessian peasants and workers by the society but had very little effect on them. (Indeed, many of the copies were handed over to the police.) After returning to his parents' home in Darmstadt while authorities conducted an investigation into the pamphlet's distributors, Büchner began to write his first play, *Danton's Death*, in the early months of 1835. Hoping the play's publication would help finance his escape from Germany before his impending arrest, Büchner sent the manuscript to Karl Gutzkow, a young German man of letters who succeeded in selling it to a publisher. Before he received payment for the play, however, Büchner was forced to flee the country. Subsequently, he re-

nounced all revolutionary activity and resumed medical studies in Strasbourg, where, after writing a well-received dissertation, *Sur le système nerveux du barbeau* ("On the Nervous System of the Barbel"), he obtained his doctorate. During this time he also composed *Leonce and Lena* for a romantic comedy contest, wrote *Lenz*, and began work on *Woyzeck* and possibly on *Pietro Aretino*, a play that has since been lost. In late 1836 he moved to Switzerland, where he taught at the University of Zurich. Early the following year, Büchner became ill with typhus. He died in February 1837 at the age of twenty-four. Following Büchner's death, his family would not allow his manuscripts in their possession to be published. Moreover, Wilhelmine Jaegle, to whom Büchner was secretly engaged in Strasbourg and who initially cooperated with Gutzkow by sending him *Leonce and Lena* and *Lenz* for publication in his periodical *Telegraf für Deutschland*, eventually became unwilling to surrender the other writings by Büchner that she owned. She destroyed all of her copies of his writings before she died in 1880. The first significant and complete edition of Büchner's works did not appear until 1879, when Karl Emil Franzos issued *Sämtliche Werke und handschriftlicher Nachlaß* after years of interviewing Büchner's acquaintances and collecting his manuscripts, letters, and papers. In the 1880s the popular German playwright Gerhard Hauptmann enthusiastically praised Büchner, and in 1902 and 1913, respectively, *Danton's Death* and *Woyzeck* were given their first stage productions.

MAJOR WORKS

In his early political pamphlet *The Hessian Courier*, Büchner and his co-author urged the lower classes to violently rise against the landed aristocracy, basing this exhortation on the grounds of radical socioeconomic reasoning for the period. The work had little tangible effect, although it has since been regarded as an original and innovative revolutionary manifesto. Büchner's first literary work, *Danton's Death* is frequently regarded as an expression of the author's subsequent disillusionment with radical politics. The play focuses on the last days of French Revolutionary leader Georges Jacques Danton, who, after the new regime had been established, became a proponent of peace and thus came into conflict with fellow insurrectionist Maximilien de Robespierre. Accusing Danton of trying to overthrow the government, Robespierre has him guillotined. Büchner depicts Danton as a passive hero who succumbs to the forces that oppose and torment him. These forces, ostensibly Robespierre and his adherents, are in the abstract a historical inevitability, what Büchner called in an often-quoted letter the "terrible fatalism of history." While the dialogue of *Danton's Death* makes explicit Büchner's deterministic views, the themes of his later writings are more implicitly expressed. In the comedy

Leonce and Lena, the title characters, the Prince of Popo and the Princess of Pepe, are unwilling victims of a mutually unsatisfying arranged marriage. They each attempt to escape their fate by running away, but they meet again, neither realizing the other's identity. Ultimately they fall in love and, when their identities are revealed, marry. Seemingly a derivative and light romantic comedy, *Leonce and Lena* features dark overtones of suicidal boredom, pessimism, and despair, themes that are also emphasized in Büchner's last, uncompleted play, *Woyzeck*. The title character of this later play is a poor young army private who, driven to madness by jealousy and his vision of a wretched and futile existence, murders his girlfriend and then commits suicide. Regarded as one of the first plays to portray a lower-class hero, *Woyzeck* is often perceived as a work of trenchant social criticism. The forces oppressing *Woyzeck* are represented by three grotesque figures from a higher social class, each deeply motivated by the repressed hopelessness and suffering that characterize the universe of Büchner's plays. These characters include the Captain, who continually berates *Woyzeck*; the Drum Major, who is having an affair with *Woyzeck's* girlfriend; and the Doctor, who uses the private as an experimental subject, feeding him nothing but peas in order to determine his minimal nutritional requirements. Büchner's only work of prose fiction, the novella fragment *Lenz*, is based upon an episode in the life of *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and Stress") playwright Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz. This work portrays the gradual deterioration of Lenz's mind, culminating in his total mental collapse. To achieve realism in the story, Büchner employs a complex technique of shifting viewpoints to render each subtle nuance of Lenz's situation. Within a given paragraph, Büchner will often begin by describing a scene from the viewpoint of an objective third-person narrator, then abruptly switch to Lenz's sensory and psychological perspective, a method deemed very effective by critics.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Since the discovery of Büchner's works in the late nineteenth century, criticism has been for the most part positive, underscoring a shift in aesthetic sensibilities that has made his writings far more acceptable to modern literary tastes than those of Büchner's own time. While some commentators have pointed to the discursive, unrefined quality of his writings, arguing that they lack the polish achieved by more mature artists, most contend that Büchner attained a remarkable artistic and philosophical sophistication during his brief life. *Woyzeck*, despite its unfinished state, has generally been regarded as Büchner's masterpiece. Together with the somewhat more thematically transparent *Danton's Death*, this play is thought to evince Büchner's unique philosophical outlook, since recognized as a forerunner to twentieth-century Existentialism and the Theater of

the Absurd. Equally noted by scholars are the aesthetic concerns and techniques displayed in these works. Büchner's forward-looking dramatic methods and theories, traced by a few commentators to the works of William Shakespeare and the *Sturm und Drang* playwrights, are more typically thought to anticipate techniques employed by twentieth-century playwrights, particularly Bertolt Brecht. Additionally, Büchner's novella *Lenz* has generally been considered a seminal piece of German prose fiction, and a work that demonstrates Büchner's break with the dominant literary aesthetics of his age. In an early part of the story, Lenz discusses his theories of art, attacking the idealism of the German Romantics. Lenz states, "I demand of art that it be life. . . . Let them try just once to immerse themselves in the life of humble people and then reproduce this again in all its movements, its implications, its subtle, scarcely discernible play of expression." While some critics have argued that this statement merely summarizes Lenz's views on art, most critics accept it as also epitomizing Büchner's aesthetic precepts.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Der Hessische Landbote* [*The Hessian Courier*] [with Friedrich Ludwig Weidig] (pamphlet) 1834
Dantons Tod [*Danton's Death*] (play) 1835
Leonce und Lena [*Leonce and Lena*] (play) 1838
Lenz (unfinished novella) 1839
Nachgelassene Schriften (plays and unfinished novella) 1850
Sämtliche Werke und handschriftlicher Nachlaß (plays and unfinished novella) 1879
 **Woyzeck* (unfinished play) 1879
The Plays of Georg Büchner (plays) 1927
Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. 2 vols. (pamphlet, plays, unfinished novella, translations, and letters) 1967-71
Georg Büchner: The Complete Collected Works (pamphlet, plays, unfinished novella, translations, and letters) 1977

*This play was first published in *Sämtliche Werke und handschriftlicher Nachlaß*.

CRITICISM

Herbert Lindenberger (essay date 1964)

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[In the following essay, Lindenberger seeks to establish Büchner's position between neoclassical and modern European literature.]

Büchner's revolt against a classicism gone stale was by no means the first such revolt in German drama. The Storm-and-Stress writers of the 1770's, in the name of spontaneity and truthfulness to nature, and with Lessing's criticism and Shakespeare's example to back them, had succeeded in clearing the German stage of its dreary, "correct" neoclassical drama—a development of the mid-eighteenth century which, as we now see it, never produced anything of lasting value anyway and whose best-known work, Gottsched's *Dying Cato* (1730), is nothing more than a pale, academic imitation of French and English plays on the same theme. One can, indeed, look at the history of German drama as a kind of alternation between relatively tight "classical" forms of one sort or another, and looser forms which derive much of their energy from their conscious revolt against an out-going theatrical tradition. Bertolt Brecht's demand for an "epic theater" can be interpreted as the latest of a number of war cries which have resounded in German dramatic criticism at various times in the last two hundred years.

Büchner's work bears only superficial resemblances to the major single achievement of the Storm-and-Stress drama, Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773). Like *Danton's Death*, *Götz* presents a vast historical panorama composed of short, loosely connected scenes. Through their common attempt to render what they saw as Shakespeare's truthfulness to nature, both writers achieved a fullness and earthiness of detail and created a multitude of characters who seem to breathe with a life of their own. Yet two works could scarcely be more different in spirit than *Götz* and *Danton's Death*, for Goethe's play above all demonstrates the possibility of heroic action and meaningful human relationships—the very values toward which Büchner's work expresses the most uncompromising skepticism.

But there was one dramatist of the '70's for whom Büchner felt a fundamental affinity, and that was Lenz. Büchner was drawn to Lenz not only through the personal sympathy he obviously felt toward him, but also through his interest in his plays, especially *The Private Tutor* (1774) and *The Soldiers* (1776), which he mentions in his story on Lenz. These two plays are essentially like miniature paintings, if I may borrow a term which Brecht applied to *The Private Tutor*, a play he adapted for his Berlin Ensemble.¹ In their fusion of comic and tragic moods, in their uncondescending representation of ordinary people, above all, in the concreteness and fullness with which they depict a contemporary environment, they look forward to *Woyzeck* more than any other works in earlier German drama. In his slightly ridiculous, pathetic heroes—the young cloth merchant Stolzius in *The Soldiers*, the private tutor Läufer—Lenz presents a type of passive hero which Büchner could later develop in the character of Woyzeck. Like Büchner, Lenz allows his characters to reveal themselves through their peculiarities of lan-

guage; within a single play, in fact, he presents a generous selection of human beings, each asserting his individuality by his manner of speech. Lenz' characters often seem sharply individualized in the way Büchner suggested through the words he put into Lenz' mouth: "If only artists would try to submerge themselves in the life of the very humblest person and to reproduce it with all its faint agitations, hints of experience, the subtle, hardly perceptible play of his features."²

The discussion of aesthetics in Büchner's story, partly drawn as it is from Lenz' own critical pronouncements, provides some clues to the aims the two writers hold in common. Among other things, the discussion stresses the dignity and the poetry inherent in the lives of ordinary people. Speaking of the characters he had tried to create in *The Private Tutor* and *The Soldiers*, Büchner's Lenz calls them "the most prosaic people in the world, but the emotional vein is identical in almost every individual; all that varies is the thickness of the shell which this vein must penetrate." For the artist to capture the individuality of every being, he cannot create his characters according to conventional "types" or preconceived molds of any sort, but must observe concretely, indeed, "submerge himself" as he puts it, in his individual characters. The doctrine of realism which Büchner propounds is something far removed from the much more "scientific" doctrines of many writers in the later nineteenth century. For instance, Büchner's Lenz finds an attitude of love prerequisite to all successful artistic creation: "One must love human nature in order to penetrate into the peculiar character of any individual; nobody, however insignificant, however ugly, should be despised; only then can one understand human kind as a whole." By what seems a kind of paradox, a writer can create a world of autonomous human beings only through the love he feels for them; as soon as he begins to despise them, his characters lose their individuality and become mere puppets. The artist, in fact, plays a role analogous to God's, both in the plenitude and the variety with which he creates his world: "I take it that God has made the world as it should be and that we can hardly hope to scrawl or daub anything better; our only aspiration should be to recreate modestly in His manner." And, like God, the artist has the ability to breathe life into inert matter; indeed, the artist's central function lies in his life-giving powers: "In all things I demand—life, the possibility of existence, and that's all; nor is it our business to ask whether it's beautiful, whether it's ugly. The feeling that there's life in the thing created is much more important than considerations of beauty and ugliness; it's the sole criterion in matters of art." To illustrate his theories, Büchner's Lenz contrasts the two types of art—the one represented by the Apollo Belvedere and a Raphael Madonna, the other by two Dutch or Flemish genre paintings he had recently seen. He finds the former works too "idealized," and as a result "they make me feel

quite dead." The genre paintings, which he goes on to describe in detail, "reproduce nature for me with the greatest degree of truthfulness, so that I can feel [the artist's] creation."

Except for a few remarks here and there in his letters, the discussion of aesthetics in *Lenz* is Büchner's only commentary on his own artistic ideals. But this discussion by no means provides a full rationale for his work; what it tells us—and quite appropriately so—is the points of contact he must have felt with the real Lenz. The analogy which it sets up between their literary art and genre paintings itself suggests the limits within which one may profitably compare their work. Lenz' best plays have something of the charm and the unpretentiousness which we associate with genre art, but they do not attempt to reach beyond the social frame of reference in which they are so securely rooted. (At the end of *The Private Tutor* and *The Soldiers* Lenz, in fact, shamelessly draws a pedantic social moral from his tale—a moral which, in each play, is quite inadequate to account for the richness of life which the play had seemed above all to depict.) Still, Lenz knew better than to attempt to ask the existential questions which echo so naturally out of Büchner's world. The range of reference encompassed by Büchner's plays is immeasurably wider than that of Lenz'. The discussion of aesthetics in Büchner's story, though it provides a rationale for his dramatic objectivity and his richness of detail, takes no account of many elements fundamental to his work—for example, the grotesque characterizations in *Woyzeck*, the verbal complexity and virtuosity of all three plays, the images of an inverted world which emerge out of *Danton's Death* and *Woyzeck*. Though Büchner's critics often depend on the discussion of aesthetics in *Lenz* to provide a theoretical framework for his art, one wonders if the statement, "I take it that God has made the world as it should be" (a statement, incidentally, which Büchner drew from Lenz' *Notes on the Theater*—1774), is really applicable to a body of work which continually voices its despair at the results of God's creation.

"The idealistic movement was just beginning at that time"—with these words, so fateful for Lenz, Büchner begins the discussion of aesthetics in his story. In 1778, the time in which the story takes place, Goethe was already firmly entrenched in the courtly world of Weimar and was working on *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the first of his major plays in his so-called "classical" manner. The Storm-and-Stress revolt had by this time spent its force (except for Schiller's explosive early plays, which date from the early '80's). For Lenz the advent of the "idealistic" period meant the end of a world in which he could feel himself significantly creative; the very basis of his talent was an earthy realism which the new art-ideals which were to emanate from Weimar for the next generation could scarcely accommodate.

By the time Büchner began to write, the “idealistic movement” (which German literary historians have conventionally divided into two phases—Classicism and Romanticism, the latter itself subdivided into two phases) had also spent its force. It was only natural for Büchner to seek a model in a writer from an earlier era. But Büchner’s obvious antipathy to the plays which the idealistic movement produced must not blind us to the real and enduring achievement which marks this drama at its best. The major dramatic works of German Classicism, Goethe’s *Iphigenia* (completed in 1786) and *Torquato Tasso* (1789) and Schiller’s *Wallenstein* trilogy (1799), though they are little known today outside Germany, can easily hold their own among the world’s great dramas. But a contemporary audience can scarcely approach them without some conception of the artistic and cultural premises on which they are based. For one thing, these plays are part of Goethe and Schiller’s attempt to found a national culture, of which they saw a national drama as an indispensable cornerstone. Unlike England, France and Spain during their major periods of dramatic writing, Germany lacked a vital popular theatrical tradition; as a result, the plays of Goethe and Schiller often seem a kind of hothouse growth, nurtured with a deliberateness and high-mindedness which can all too easily create a barrier to modern taste.

The dramaturgy on which these plays is based is far more closely related to that of French seventeenth-century drama than it is to Shakespeare, though it is by no means a slavish imitation of earlier models, as was the earlier type of German drama represented by *The Dying Cato*. Compared to the Storm-and-Stress plays and Büchner’s work, the German Classical plays remain essentially within the Aristotelian dramatic tradition. Their characters are invariably of high station. Their chief dramatic effects emerge out of a carefully contrived, though often relatively simple plot. In striking contrast to the Storm-and-Stress drama, they cultivate an economy of means, with the result that they sacrifice richness of detail for a more austere, lofty effect. Whereas the Storm-and-Stress plays, like Büchner’s, were generally in prose, most of the Classical dramas are in blank verse—a verse, indeed, of a rather formal sort, with a diction and syntax deliberately removed from those of ordinary conversation. A work such as *Wallenstein* (which, though publicized and translated into English verse by so powerful a voice as Coleridge’s, is scarcely known today to English-speaking readers) succeeds in creating a type of effect quite foreign to that of the various German anti-Aristotelian dramas before and after it. For in *Wallenstein* Schiller, like the ancient Greek tragedians, is centrally concerned with the mysteries inherent in a man’s relation to his destiny; his dramatic method, with its cunning contrivance of plot, its disdain for “extraneous” detail, and its careful balance of concrete situation and abstract idea, allows the larger metaphysical questions to emerge natu-

rally out of his fable with an intensity and singularity of effect which dramatists such as Büchner and Brecht have chosen to do without.

A sympathetic reading of the major German plays in the “classical” manner suggests that the distinction which Büchner’s Lenz draws between “idealized” and “real” characters is not altogether fair to the actual practice of Goethe and Schiller. The characters of *Wallenstein*, for instance, are “idealized” only to the extent that they speak a somewhat heightened language and are not depicted in the informal situations in which Büchner customarily presents his characters. But Schiller’s characters at their best are also concretely differentiated from one another and, once one accepts the premises of his dramatic method, the reader or audience quite naturally comes to believe in them as living beings. Büchner, like any artist confronting a mode of art antithetical to his own, probably did not bother to distinguish between Schiller at his best and at his worst: his two recorded comments on Schiller, both of them negative, attack him for being too “rhetorical” and for creating characters who are essentially “puppets with sky-blue noses and affected pathos, but not flesh-and-blood human beings.”³ And with the notable exception of *Wallenstein* (and perhaps also his uncompleted play *Demetrius*—1805), one must admit that Büchner’s view of Schiller’s “classical” plays is more or less a just one. In a play such as *The Bride of Messina* (1802), a much more conscious attempt than *Wallenstein* to re-create the effect of Greek tragedy, Schiller’s high-mindedness comes to seem virtually unbearable. And, quite in contrast to *Wallenstein*, such later historical plays as *The Maid of Orleans* (1801), *Mary Stuart* (1800) and *William Tell* (1804) fail to embody their lofty central “idea” in any concrete dramatic situation in which a modern audience can honestly believe.

By the time Büchner wrote his first play Schiller had been dead for thirty years and was firmly entrenched as the chief classic of the German theater. Indeed, the rhetoric and the “affected pathos” of which Büchner complains had become standard conventions of German drama—conventions so deeply rooted that the major German dramatists of our century have felt a continuing need to challenge them. It seems only natural that writers like Gerhart Hauptmann and Brecht would look back to Büchner—as the latter looked back to Lenz—as a forerunner in their revolt against the Classical tradition in German drama.

But Büchner was not the first writer in his own century to challenge this tradition. At least two writers, Heinrich von Kleist and Christian Dietrich Grabbe, experimented with significantly new ways of dramatic expression. On the surface, at least, Kleist’s plays seem to continue the Classical framework, for they utilize the basic conventions which Goethe and Schiller had estab-

lished in their Classical plays. Kleist's major plays, *The Broken Jug* (1806), *Penthesilea* (1808), and *The Prince of Homburg* (1810), all maintain the formality of blank verse, and all are marked by the most rigorous economy of structure. Like the Classical plays before them, they are built out of a closely connected chain of events which lead up to the climax (the first two of these plays, though they are full length, each consist of a single, sustained act); and quite unlike Büchner's dramas they allow their central conflicts to develop through the direct confrontation of characters with one another.

Yet, despite his apparently traditional form, Kleist was far less an imitator than an innovator. His language, though elevated in diction, has a taut and breathless quality which, more than any other dramatic blank verse in German, creates the illusion of being spoken by living beings. Moreover, despite his Classical dramaturgy, which is predicated on the assumption that characters can express their conflicts with one another in verbal terms, his plays, like Büchner's, ultimately suggest the inability of human beings to communicate meaningfully at all. In *Penthesilea*, for example, the two chief characters appear to communicate with one another in an idyllic love scene, but the heroine, discovering that their relationship is based on a fundamental misunderstanding, ends up tricking her lover into a brutal death-trap. Kleist, one might say, exploits a dramatic method based on character relationships only to lay bare the deceptiveness inherent in these relationships. Like Büchner, Kleist was little known or appreciated in his own time; there is, in fact, no reason to think that Büchner discerned his real significance, if he read him at all. Yet despite their basic differences in dramatic technique, Kleist and Büchner share a certain kinship through the skepticism and the despair which their works voice with a notable lack of pretentiousness; and it hardly seems accidental that Kleist's plays, like Büchner's, achieved no general acclaim until our own century.

Grabbe, too, was little understood in his age. Although the quality of his achievement is considerably below that of Kleist and Büchner, his experiments in dramatic form anticipate much that Büchner was to develop in his own way. Grabbe's early plays are still largely in the grand style, and their blank verse betrays the staleness into which the language of Classical drama had fallen in the generation after Schiller. His heroes, quite in contrast to Büchner's, are also conceived in the grand manner; all, in fact, are men of titanic proportions—Napoleon, Hannibal, the Hohenstaufen emperors—who go to their doom through no fault of their own, but through the pettiness of a world which cannot support such titans. But Grabbe's later plays, above all *Napoleon or the Hundred Days* (1831) and *Hannibal* (1835), seem just as boldly "experimental" as *Danton's Death*.

Napoleon, which Büchner doubtless knew when he wrote his first play, presents a vast panoramic view of

the events immediately leading up to Waterloo. Grabbe makes no attempt, as would a dramatist in the Classical tradition, to present these events in any causal chain. The play, in fact, is essentially a vivid and bounteous chronicle which focuses on such diverse phenomena as the crowds on the streets of Paris, soldiers in barracks on the eve of battle, the newly restored Bourbon court, and Napoleon vainly attempting to re-establish his past glory without realizing he lacked the means to do so. *Napoleon* is written in a terse and racy prose, a style which, unlike the verse of his earlier tragedies, is able to accommodate a wide variety of tones and to portray the historical milieu with a lively intimacy. In its mixture of comic and tragic elements, its technique of short, contrasting scenes, and its treatment of the common people caught up by vast historical forces, it may well have served as a model for *Danton's Death*. Though *Napoleon* still reads with a certain vitality, Grabbe did not, like Büchner, succeed in fusing the quite diverse components of his play to create a single, closely organized whole; and as a result, the play remains far more interesting in its individual details than in its totality. Above all, Grabbe lacks that quality of dramatic objectivity which I have tried to describe in Büchner's work. Karl Gutzkow tried to define this difference between the two writers in a letter he wrote to Büchner to encourage him in his work: "If one observes [Grabbe's] stiff, forced, bony manner, one must make the most favorable predictions for your fresh, effervescent natural powers."⁴ If Gutzkow's statement is perhaps a bit unfair to Grabbe, it is also notable as the most powerful critical praise Büchner was to receive either in his lifetime or until half a century after his death.

II

It is a tribute to the richness and variety of Büchner's achievement that each of the writers who have felt his impact have absorbed a different aspect of his work. Gerhart Hauptmann, the first major figure whom Büchner influenced, shares Büchner's sympathy for the sufferings of lowly people. Hauptmann's career, which spans almost six decades, includes a vast variety of forms and themes, from contemporary social realism to symbolic fantasy to grand-style tragedy based on Greek myth. But Hauptmann seems closest to Büchner in his early, largely realistic period. His short story, *The Apostle* (1890), a study of a modern religious fanatic, attempts to imitate the narrative method of Büchner's *Lenz*; yet Hauptmann's interior monologue today reads like a somewhat dated technical experiment, while Büchner's retains a freshness and naturalness which belie its great distance from us in time. Hauptmann perhaps came closest to the spirit of Büchner's work in his drama *The Weavers* (1892) which depicts an actual peasant uprising of the 1840's such as Büchner might have stirred up in his Giessen days. But Hauptmann's play is no socialist tract, as its early audiences often

thought. Like Büchner in *Danton's Death*, Hauptmann questions the value of revolution while at the same time showing a high degree of sympathy for the grievances of the common people he is portraying.

In two later plays, *Henschel the Carter* (1898) and *Rose Bernd* (1903), Hauptmann, like Büchner in *Woyzeck*, succeeds in giving a traditional tragic dignity to inarticulate and passive characters of humble background. Hauptmann goes much further than Büchner in attempting to paint a detailed and authentic social milieu; indeed, the Silesian dialect of the original version of *The Weavers* would have proved so difficult for German readers that he had to "translate" the play into a more easily comprehensible form. Hauptmann's figures often have the brooding, explosive quality that he doubtless discerned in many of Büchner's figures, perhaps even in Büchner himself, whose genius Hauptmann once characterized as "glowing lava hurled out of Chthonic depths."⁵ The characters and backgrounds of Hauptmann's best "realist" plays still seem impressive today, though his dramaturgy, with its well-wrought plots and his carefully planned motivations and foreshadowings, seems somewhat old-fashioned next to Büchner's, which shares the disdain for traditional theatrical effect of much contemporary drama.

If Hauptmann drew largely from the realistic side of Büchner's work, Frank Wedekind drew from the "unreal" side of Büchner, above all, the grotesque element which he discerned in the doctor, captain and carnival figures in *Woyzeck*. In his early play, *The Awakening of Spring* (1891), a violent and impassioned protest against the suppression of sexual knowledge in the education of the young, Wedekind depicts his middle-class characters as the kind of grotesque, perverted beings Büchner had presented before him. But Wedekind's entire poetic world is made up of grotesque types: the naturalness and dramatic objectivity with which characters such as Büchner's Marie, Marion and Danton are presented were totally foreign to Wedekind's talent. Ideologically, however, Wedekind's plays attempt to propagate a doctrine of naturalness; thus, in his character Lulu, the heroine of *The Earth Spirit* and its sequel, *Pandora's Box* (1895), Wedekind created a symbol of amoral and instinctual nature. As a literary type, Lulu is perhaps less akin to Büchner's Marie than to his drum major, whom she resembles in the exaggerated manner in which her "naturalness" is depicted.

Wedekind's success as a dramatic artist, one realizes today, falls short of his success as a liberating force in German culture at the turn of the century; though he was often capable of crudely powerful effects, he rarely succeeded in finding an adequate dramatic embodiment for the new ideas he was so intent on disseminating. Even if one admires his integrity, his Lulu, one must admit, is a rather dated creature who lives less surely in

Wedekind's plays than in the opera which Alban Berg built around her. Through Wedekind, however, one side of Büchner—the rebel against bourgeois convention and the creator of the grotesquely extravagant language which Wedekind found in parts of *Woyzeck*—was transmitted to the Expressionist dramatists who followed him and, above all, to Bertolt Brecht.⁶

The fact that Berg's only two operas are based on *Woyzeck* and the Lulu plays is, I think, a testimony to the continuity which Berg's generation felt between Büchner's and Wedekind's work. Berg's setting (1921) of Büchner's play is itself an important instance of the impact of Büchner on our own century. Berg prepared his own libretto, and at first sight one feels amazed at how closely he followed Büchner's text. To be sure, he used only about two thirds of Büchner's scenes, and even these were sometimes pared down for economy's sake. But Berg stuck to the original dialogue to a relatively high degree and managed to retain much of the flavor of the play. His musical method, indeed, often succeeds in heightening Büchner's most original dramatic effects. For example, in Marie's repentance scene the music shifts back and forth in mood as Marie alternately reads from the Bible and expresses her own thoughts, and at the end of the scene it reaches a climax as piercing as any one might imagine from the text.

In its total effect, however, the opera seems a work of a very different kind from the play. Through the heavy orchestral commentary, which presents the composer's point of view on the events, the characters seem far less autonomous beings than they do in the original. The orchestra, in addition, serves to underline that sense of a malign fate which, because of the difference between the two media, hovers over the play in a far less distinct way. Indeed, the atonality of much of the music seems ideally suited to producing the eerie effects which Berg so obviously sought, especially in the final scenes. The character Wozzeck (whose name Berg spelled as it appeared in the Franzos edition of Büchner) seems even more passive and inarticulate than he does in the play. Among the passages which Berg cut out are those in which he asserts his dignity, for example the scene in which he gives Andres his belongings and reads his identification papers. Berg quite deliberately emphasized the abnormality and the suffering of his hero, who thus emerges as a helpless, crazed animal. Berg's version also stressed the economic degradation of the characters; in fact, the musical phrase which accompanies Wozzeck's words, "Wir arme Leut'"—"We poor folk"—is the chief leitmotif of the opera, achieving its fullest force in the long and powerful orchestral interlude which directly follows Wozzeck's suicide.

Berg's emphasis on the play's psychological and social aspects is accompanied by a lack of emphasis on the existential questions which Büchner poses so persis-