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THE EXTENT TO WHICH GEORG BÜCHNER USES WOYZECK TO REFLECT AND  
CRITIQUE CONTEMPORANEOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SCIENCE

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## Abstract

# THE EXTENT TO WHICH GEORG BÜCHNER USES *WOYZECK* TO REFLECT AND CRITIQUE CONTEMPORANEOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

By Nathaniel L. Cox

Although Georg Büchner originally drafted *Woyzeck* in 1837, its final form would not be published until 1879 by the Austrian writer Karl Emil Franzos in his heavily revised edition of the play. This is because Büchner died of Typhus the same year he wrote *Woyzeck*, leaving the unfinished draft as a grand mystery for theater-enthusiasts for centuries to come. The original draft of the play's scenes was discovered after having sustained serious damage, and without having any apparent order, thus rendering the play open for speculation and interpretation from all who read it.

However, perhaps the most interesting thing about this play is the true story it's based on. Being a physician, Büchner's father took interest in the forensic psychiatric case of Johann Christian Woyzeck when Büchner was a young boy. Johann Woyzeck was an orphan who served as a mercenary during the Napoleonic wars, and spent the rest of his time carrying out odd jobs, thieving, and causing trouble wherever he went. He ended up murdering his mistress and being sentenced to execution, and did not receive a psychiatric evaluation from a mental health professional. Many physicians believed that he very well may have been mentally ill.

Büchner followed in his father's footsteps as a physician and later became a playwright. Büchner's *Woyzeck* is more than simply a play; it is a protest against ignorance towards mental illness. Some claim the play to be one of the first modern dramas, and it definitely stands as an early example of surrealist elements that Büchner innovated long before the official movement took place. Büchner's *Woyzeck* character embodies contemporary issues faced by the German lower class, and also stimulates progressive ideas about how to move humanity forward in its pursuit of righteousness and purpose.

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## ONE

## INTRODUCTION – WOYZECK AND THE ORIGINS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Georg Büchner presents a profound link between theater and the origins of psychological science in his play, *Woyzeck*, which he first drafted in 1837.<sup>1</sup> The play centers on a lowly German soldier, Woyzeck, who is driven to the point of insanity by an oppressive 19<sup>th</sup>-century German society. This was a revolutionary new use of theater to make a political statement about a real psychological case, the likes of which was not accepted in mainstream society until long after Büchner's time. In another illustration of the dialogue shared by theater and psychology, Sigmund Freud was one of the first and most famous psychologists to explicitly use theatrical characters as case studies to support his theories some 60 years after Büchner's time. Büchner's *Woyzeck* would have helped develop a particularly relevant case study for early psychologists had the field been established as a scientific pursuit when Büchner wrote it. After considering this information, the central research question of the following thesis is: to what extent does

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1. Victoria M. Stiles, "Woyzeck in focus: Werner Herzog and his critics," (*Literature Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3, July 1996), 226.



Georg Büchner use *Woyzeck* to reflect and critique contemporaneous developments in psychological science?

*Woyzeck* reflects Germany's cultural prejudices during the early 1800s, particularly prejudices regarding the lower class. Reflecting on the many hardships of the lower class, Büchner used *Woyzeck* especially to illustrate the damaging effects of human experimentation. The play is based on a real man, Johann Christian Woyzeck, who murdered his mistress, Johanna Christiane Woost, in 1821.<sup>2</sup> Following this incident, Johann Woyzeck underwent unpleasant medical experimentation to determine his sanity and whether he could fairly be punished for his crime.<sup>3</sup> Büchner portrays one of these potential experimentations in his play by having Woyzeck take extra pay to consume a compulsory diet of nothing but peas; which was likely inspired by the actual experiments of Dr. Justus von Liebig of Büchner's medical school in Gießen, who regularly performed these sorts of experiments on soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the historical Woyzeck, Büchner's character undergoes human experimentation before, not after, he murders his

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2. Nicholas Pethes, "Vieh dummes Individuum", "unsterblichste Experimente". Elements for a Cultural History of Human Experimentation in Georg Büchner's Dramatic Case Study *Woyzeck*" (*Monatshefte* 98, no. 1, Spring 2006), 68.

3. Nicholas Pethes, "Vieh dummes Individuum", "unsterblichste Experimente". Elements for a Cultural History of Human Experimentation in Georg Büchner's Dramatic Case Study *Woyzeck*" (*Monatshefte* 98, no. 1, Spring 2006), 69.

4. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 117.; Victoria Stiles, "Woyzeck in focus: Werner Herzog and his critics," (*Literature Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3, July 1996), 227.

mistress, Marie. However, it is clear that Büchner's nightmarish fantasy is founded in the unethical reality of experimental medicine during his time.

Along with the historical parallel of human experimentation, Büchner's Woyzeck is constantly reminded by his elitist captain and military superior that he has no morality.<sup>5</sup> Büchner's Woyzeck does not argue with this point, but instead decides that it is impossible for him to become moral.<sup>6</sup> This textual clue is worth noting because Johann Woyzeck was known for his thieving, petty crimes, unruly behavior, and lack of moral empathy even *before* he murdered his mistress Marie.<sup>7</sup> Johann Woyzeck was a soldier for hire as well as a wig-maker, much like Büchner's Woyzeck, who is in the military but also takes money to shave his captain's face.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to Johann Woyzeck, it is likely that Büchner's Woyzeck was influenced by two other cases of men who stabbed and killed women out of jealousy during the same period. These men were Daniel Schmolling and Johann Dieß, who, unlike Johann

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5. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 110.

6. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 110.

7. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 169.

8. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 169.

Woyzeck, were not executed, but declared insane and institutionalized.<sup>9</sup> Considering the fact that Büchner's Woyzeck is seemingly driven to the point of insanity by his harsh lifestyle and drastic experimental participation, Büchner may very well have been making the case that Johann Woyzeck and others like him deserved further evaluation before being brutally categorized as insane without hope of recovery or simply executed.

The human understanding of psychology and mental health during Büchner's time had not yet evolved into a scientific pursuit, but was instead understood as a combination of physiological processes and the meta-physical well-being of the soul.<sup>10</sup> Doctors were just beginning to take the place of philosophers in studying mental illness, and asylums were established to house patients who were thought to have psychological disorders.<sup>11</sup> Although these were indeed steps toward the scientific testing of mental illness, the asylums were under the complete authority of the doctors and staff who administered patient examinations. Asylum administrators had little regard for commonly accepted medical practices or the moral treatment of their patients. It was not until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that British clinical practices inspired more ethical

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9. Victoria M. Stiles, "Woyzeck in focus: Werner Herzog and his critics," (*Literature Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3, July 1996), 227.

10. Nicholas Pethes, "Viehdummes Individuum", "unsterblichste Experimente". Elements for a Cultural History of Human Experimentation in Georg Büchner's Dramatic Case Study Woyzeck" (*Monatshefte* 98, no. 1, Spring 2006), 69.

11. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

treatment of psychiatric patients undergoing institutionalized care and experimentation in Germany. This was approximately the same time that French medical practices came to steer psychology closer to scientific objectivity.<sup>12</sup> Although this progress would eventually lead to Germany's becoming the birthplace of scientific psychology, Büchner would not live to see this revolutionary new pursuit.

Büchner's early, unfinished theatrical adaptation of Johann Woyzeck's story was posthumously finished, reworked, and published by Karl Emil Franzos in 1879, the same year that the first self-proclaimed psychologist, Wilhelm Wundt, established the first psychology laboratory in Germany.<sup>13</sup> However, *Woyzeck* was not produced on-stage until 1913, at which point the foundations for many psychological principles had been laid down by world-renowned thinkers including Freud and the American psychologist William James. The overlapping histories of *Woyzeck* and psychology as an academic discipline have led me to hypothesize that Büchner's conception of *Woyzeck* was influenced by the advent of early psychological principles and practices, as was the play's eventual production.

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12. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

13. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 322.

Büchner's *Woyzeck* was discovered in four separate drafts<sup>14</sup> after his untimely death from typhus on February 19, 1837 at the age of 23.<sup>15</sup> The original manuscript had sustained severe damage before it was found and is thought to have been unfinished.<sup>16</sup> A variety of interpretations and translations have been released since *Woyzeck* was discovered, the first of which was written by the Austrian author, editor, and publisher Karl Emil Franzos in 1879.<sup>17</sup> Although a wide variety of more recent translations and interpretations of *Woyzeck* have vastly improved on Franzos's less accurate version, there is no definitive edition. Among the most popular English translations, and the source employed in this thesis, was written in 1963 by the popular German translator, Carl Richard Mueller, in his volume *Georg Büchner Complete Plays and Prose*.

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14. Nicholas Pethes, "Vieh dummes Individuum", "unsterblichste Experimente". Elements for a Cultural History of Human Experimentation in Georg Büchner's Dramatic Case Study *Woyzeck*" (*Monatshefte* 98, no. 1, Spring 2006), 70.

15. Victoria M. Stiles, "Woyzeck in focus: Werner Herzog and his critics," (*Literature Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3, July 1996), 227.

16. Gerhard H. Knapp, "A History of Its Criticism (Book)," (*German Quarterly* 75, no. 4, Fall 2002), 445.

17. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment *Woyzeck* His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 322.

## TWO

THEATER'S RELATIONSHIP TO PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE  
MIND

It was not until Wilhelm Wundt's work in 1879 that psychology gained autonomy from philosophy and medicine as a subject worthy of independent research. Wundt understood the value of the experimental approach when attempting to break down psychological phenomena into their more simplistic components, as opposed to the naturalistic method of understanding complex processes that was used up to his time.<sup>18</sup> Wundt conducted carefully manipulated experiments in his laboratory in Leipzig, but he knew that culture was the ultimate determinant of complex human processes, and that simple experimentation would never be able to provide complete explanations of these multivariate, culturally developed mental processes.<sup>19</sup>

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18. John G. Benjafield, "Research Methods: A History of Some Important Strands," (*Archives Of Suicide Research* 6, no. 1, January 2002), 5.

19. John G. Benjafield, "Research Methods: A History of Some Important Strands," (*Archives Of Suicide Research* 6, no. 1, January 2002), 5.

Although Wundt's quantitative methods would live on to inspire empirical work to this day, qualitative research has continued to evolve and thrive as well.<sup>20</sup> Wundt's foundational claims regarding the importance of cultural variant constructs was likely understood by Büchner and taken advantage of in his writing.<sup>21</sup> Büchner was born in Hessen, Germany on October 17, 1813, and moved to the French city of Strasberg for medical school in 1831, where he developed a fascination with the wonders of contemporary medical advancements.<sup>22</sup> However, the Hessen government mandated a two-year limit on studies abroad, which forced Büchner to return home in 1833.<sup>23</sup> After becoming very sick and missing his life in Strasberg, Büchner experienced a deep depression for many months, which likely inspired the vast psychological depth he was able to explore in his theatrical characters.<sup>24</sup>

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20. John G. Benjafield, "Research Methods: A History of Some Important Strands," (*Archives Of Suicide Research* 6, no. 1, January 2002), 8.

21. L. J. Crighton, "Anatomy And Subversion: 150th Anniversary Of Georg Büchner's Death," (*British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 294, no. 6570, 1987), 491.

22. L. J. Crighton, "Anatomy And Subversion: 150th Anniversary Of Georg Büchner's Death," (*British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 294, no. 6570, 1987), 490.

23. L. J. Crighton, "Anatomy And Subversion: 150th Anniversary Of Georg Büchner's Death," (*British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 294, no. 6570, 1987), 490.

24. L. J. Crighton, "Anatomy And Subversion: 150th Anniversary Of Georg Büchner's Death," (*British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)* 294, no. 6570, 1987), 490.

Like Büchner, Wundt was severely underappreciated considering his massive contributions to the field of psychology during his time. Wundt's daughter Eleonore eventually compiled his life's work and published it in 1927, spreading his influence to psychologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Of the many fields that Wundt studied and impacted, he considered psychology to be the subject most intimately involved in explaining phenomena related to the human mind, even more so than philosophy and the like (e.g. theology, art, law, history, economics, etc.).<sup>26</sup>

Wundt firmly believed in psychology's freedom from physiological constructs, despite his previous work as a physician.<sup>27</sup> This transition from medical to psychological study can also be observed in Büchner's life through his abruptly interrupted medical school experience to his exploration of the human condition in his plays. Büchner's work in theater undoubtedly presented a dialogue between philosophical notions regarding the inherent value of human life and the harsh psychological realities of mental disorders

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25. Wong Wan-chi, "RETRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILHELM WUNDT: Explorations in the Disciplinary Frontiers of Psychology and in Völkerpsychologie," (*History Of Psychology* 12, no. 4, November 2009), 230.

26. Wong Wan-chi, "RETRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILHELM WUNDT: Explorations in the Disciplinary Frontiers of Psychology and in Völkerpsychologie," (*History Of Psychology* 12, no. 4, November 2009), 239.

27. Wong Wan-chi, "RETRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILHELM WUNDT: Explorations in the Disciplinary Frontiers of Psychology and in Völkerpsychologie," (*History Of Psychology* 12, no. 4, November 2009), 239.



and their resulting degradation of the quality of that human life.<sup>28</sup> *Woyzeck* embodies this interdisciplinary battle, demanding an answer to a question that threatened the very foundation of civilized society: how should the mentally ill be handled and treated by a world that has no way of understanding their various psychoses? Although this question would later be addressed by Wundt and his contemporaries as a part of psychology's ever-expanding set of objectives, Büchner was the first to address it, and his contemporaries were simply ill-equipped and not yet ready to accept and help him pursue solutions to this conundrum.

Büchner believed that humans should try to empathize with the psychologically disturbed, which is an idea that has haunted Western society since his death in 1837, and one which we have ignored at our own expense.<sup>29</sup> Freud's psychodynamic and ego theories of psychology that were developed around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be used to help explain the concepts that Büchner aimed to capture in *Woyzeck* and, arguably, his other plays as well. Büchner's level of morality can be classified as primarily stemming from his "superego," which involves having a higher sense of right and wrong that goes beyond what might be considered realistic by one's society; although his

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28. Benedict Schofield, "Commitment and Compassion: Essays on Georg Büchner. Festschrift for Gerhard P. Knapp," (*Modern Language Review* 110, no. 1, January 2015), 289.

29. Benedict Schofield, "Commitment and Compassion: Essays on Georg Büchner. Festschrift for Gerhard P. Knapp," (*Modern Language Review* 110, no. 1, January 2015), 289.

characters, especially Woyzeck, appear to showcase the lower “id” level of morality that relies on subconscious and animalistic drives to function.<sup>30</sup>

Büchner’s purpose in showing audiences characters driven by primal impulses is likely to warn us of the profound consequences of allowing real people who share this quality to roam the streets without proper treatment. In Woyzeck’s case, the result of his undiagnosed psychoses and impulsive tendencies was catastrophic, and ultimately led to the death of an innocent woman due to Woyzeck’s unchecked anger and lack of control in the face of extreme jealousy.<sup>31</sup>

Büchner also takes advantage of what Freud may postulate to be unconscious mechanisms. In Woyzeck’s doomed journey through his disturbing set of existential circumstances, he begins to experience apocalyptic hallucinations and paranoid delusions, which Freud would likely attribute to subconscious worries and disturbances that could be rooted in events that occurred earlier in Woyzeck’s life (of which Büchner does not explicitly address in the play, but of which the audience likely assumes).<sup>32</sup>

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30. Paul Coates, "Where id was...": Danton According to Georg Büchner, Stanisława Przybyszewska and Andrzej Wajda," (*Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 81, July 2012), 284.

31. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 134.

32. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 125.

A final point of significance that links Freud to both Büchner and Wundt is his transition from the medical field to the strict study of psychology.<sup>33</sup> This fact is worthy of note because it provides a critical link between the field of medicine and psychology and the logical progression from the study of physical to mental health taken by many contemporaries of the time, which was also a drastic leap taken by the wider Western society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Büchner's life and work is arguably the first observable example of this leap, and psychologists would later develop this connection between medicine and mental health more fully by studying psychosomatic illnesses as well as other related topics.

Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig emphasized the connection between experimental psychology, philosophy, and other related fields (e.g. medical, physical, and natural sciences).<sup>34</sup> The reason for this is that the various realms of psychology are inevitably influenced by outside fields, thus necessitating the dual study of psychology and other fields in order to answer questions in a meaningful way.<sup>35</sup> Büchner understood this, as can be made clear by his medical experience prior to pursuing drama, both of which he

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33. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Georg Büchner, Sigmund Freud and the 'Schädelnerven' (cranial nerves) - research on the brain and soul in the 19th century," (*Acta Neurochirurgica* 156, no. 10, October 2014), 2000.

34. Nicolas Serge, et al., "French Descriptions of Wundt's Laboratory in Leipzig in 1886," (*Psychological Research* 66, no. 3, August 2002), 210.

35. Nicolas Serge, et al., "French Descriptions of Wundt's Laboratory in Leipzig in 1886," (*Psychological Research* 66, no. 3, August 2002), 210.

was able to take advantage of to study and address society's handling of human psychopathology and its philosophical implications.

In spite of the general shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century towards a more strictly empirical methodology of experimental psychology, the field's original roots of humanistic philosophy still exist in the modern day, and the classic works of psychologists like Freud, James, and Wundt are finally being re-evaluated.<sup>36</sup> The interpretive approaches used by clinical psychologists to help patients who suffer from mental disorders can be explored using subjects less restricted by the scientific method such as art and philosophy. Büchner's dramatic works like *Woyzeck* are arguably more relevant now than ever before because of society's willingness to accept and learn from them. This is a significant leap for human progress because it means that latent constructs that have eluded empirical psychologists for over a century, such as the subconscious mind, can now be truthfully observed and accepted through artistic mediums and other subjective methods.<sup>37</sup>

This is not to say that empirical methods are any less important now than they have been in the past, but rather that they cannot possibly be expected to answer all

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36. Eugene Taylor, "William James and Sigmund Freud: 'The future of psychology belongs to your work'," (*Psychological Science* (0956-7976) 10, no. 6, November 1999), 465.

37. Eugene Taylor, "William James and Sigmund Freud: 'The future of psychology belongs to your work'," (*Psychological Science* (0956-7976) 10, no. 6, November 1999), 469.

questions about the human condition on their own.<sup>38</sup> The scientific pursuit uncovers small pieces of truth that, at times, exist only in the vacuum of an experimentally manipulated study in which all variables are controlled aside from those being studied. This can be beneficial in determining causality, but results often lack external validity, which means that they may not hold up in more natural circumstances in which an infinite number of uncontrolled variables may act simultaneously on the variable of interest. It is in the real world where more natural and subjective subjects such as philosophy and art may take precedence, and can reveal profound truths about the human condition as it exists in everyday life.

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38. Wilhelm Wundt, "PSYCHOLOGY'S STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE: Second Edition, 1913," (*History Of Psychology* 16, no. 3, August 2013), 198.

## THREE

## WOYZECK – THE MAN AND THE PLAY

Although Büchner did not live to see *Woyzeck* through to its being published, the play went on to significantly impact the future of Western theater. Aside from Franzos's flawed version completed in 1879, the play was later converted into two operas in the 1920s, multiple film versions, and was also published in many different editions throughout the 1900s that vary slightly in their interpretations and styles.<sup>39</sup>

Alban Berg and Manfred Gurlitt's operatic versions of *Woyzeck* were similarly titled *Wozzeck* in the 1920s, and neither composer was aware of the other's work.<sup>40</sup> Berg's production premiered in December of 1925 in Berlin, while Gurlitt's premiered four months later in Bremen.<sup>41</sup> Like Franzos's early version of *Woyzeck*, Berg's is tightly

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39. Victoria M. Stiles, "Woyzeck in focus: Werner Herzog and his critics," (*Literature Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3, July 1996), 226.

40. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 322.

41. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 322.

conformed into a typical three act drama, and it was met with fame as being the first atonal opera.<sup>42</sup>

However, Gurlitt's production is more faithful to Büchner's alleged intentions of making *Woyzeck* an avant-garde and fragmentary play, which both Gurlitt and Berg believed to be true.<sup>43</sup> Gurlitt's version removed any material non-essential to the play's plot, leaving only Woyzeck and Marie's parts fully intact while emphasizing the concept of human suffering that Büchner cared so deeply about.<sup>44</sup> Although both operas improved upon Franzos's early version, which was riddled with translation issues and changes that were unfaithful to the original text, Gurlitt's opera seems to better capture the form that Büchner intended in his original work.

Büchner is considered by many to be the first expressionist who, unfortunately, emerged long before the movement was born, thus preventing him from achieving widespread appeal in his own time. *Woyzeck* has even been hailed by some as one of the first modern dramas for various reasons including its presentation of a tragic situation

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42. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 322.

43. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 323.

44. Anna Kasten, "Told Stories and Layered Narratives: Georg Büchner's Fragment Woyzeck His Musical Adaptations." (*International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Dec. 2012), 323.

within a strict social setting, which Büchner takes advantage of to bring light to the profound injustices of his society (while managing to avoid lecturing his audiences).<sup>45</sup>

Werner Herzog's 1979 film is widely accepted as the most complete and official film version of *Woyzeck*, and is very much worthy of analysis.<sup>46</sup> The opening scene of the movie presents a miserable soldier, Woyzeck, enduring painful military exercises while being repeatedly pushed down by the boot of his superior.<sup>47</sup> This opening scene displays the main credits and sets the tone for Woyzeck's character in a tormented, yet comedic way. The following scene shows Woyzeck shaving his captain while being berated for being stupid and having no morals by the captain who, ironically, boasts about his own morality.<sup>48</sup> Herzog uses the captain's order for Woyzeck not to run down the street (after being released from his service) comedically by immediately showing Woyzeck race down the street in the window behind him.<sup>49</sup>

In these first two simple scenes alone, Herzog manages to express Büchner's criticism of the German military as being abusive, corrupt, aristocratic, and full of ego-

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45. Margaret Jacobs, "Georg Büchner and the Birth of the Modern Drama," (*Modern Language Review* 73, no. 3, July 1978), 702.

46. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

47. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

48. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

49. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).



driven fools, which causes Woyzeck some comically tragic distress and forces him to behave submissively while also breaking the silly rules laid out before him whenever he thinks he can get away with it. The film continues nearly as a mirror image of Mueller's edition of the play, which is being used as the prime reference for this report. The next two scenes consist of Woyzeck explaining his apocalyptic delusions to his friend, Andres, followed by Marie's flirtatious encounter with the drum major before being interrupted by Woyzeck, who, again, raves about his delusions and then promptly leaves.<sup>50</sup>

Most of the remainder of the film required little innovation on Herzog's part, as Büchner's text speaks for itself quite elegantly without being altered. Woyzeck's mental illness is clear and ever-present, and his toxic relationship with the doctor who experiments on him is also apparent. Herzog excels at showing us Woyzeck's struggles, and the acting in this film is believable and accurate to its written source material. The doctor is an especially notable character, as he exhibits a scheming, harsh, and "scientific" disposition that Büchner clearly resents for its lack of humanity.<sup>51</sup>

Like others before him, Herzog did shorten some of the heavier textual sections, and ordered the scenes as logically as possible to form his film's narrative. His choices all seemed to enhance the play's messages. It is painful to see the military men objectify

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50. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

51. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

Marie as she cheats on Woyzeck with the drum major, and the doctor's antics end up going so far as to force Woyzeck to catch a cat from a second story window before using him as a human subject on display for his students.<sup>52</sup> In addition to Woyzeck's silent suffering, Marie is portrayed as living and caring for her child in a cramped apartment, which draws sympathy to her character and helps explain the allure of the successful, masculine drum major.<sup>53</sup> Yet despite Woyzeck's strong suspicions of Marie's cheating on him, he continues to provide financial support for her and the child, and Herzog emphasizes this to show his audience that Woyzeck is indeed a morally ambiguous person who has been wronged by his society.<sup>54</sup>

However, the maltreatment Woyzeck is subjected to from the doctor and the military clearly takes a toll on his mental health, and he begins to rant to and even abuse Marie.<sup>55</sup> Klaus Kinski plays Woyzeck, and his face is always sunken in the film, and it appears as though he has not been sleeping.<sup>56</sup> Yet, despite Woyzeck's miserable condition, Herzog paints a picturesque image of German civilian society, which raises an interesting

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52. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

53. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

54. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

55. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

56. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

conundrum: is Woyzeck simply the only one who sees and experiences the torturous ways of his society, or could Woyzeck actually be what's wrong with his society? The various spectacles in a scene portraying a community fair symbolize Woyzeck's suffering in the sense that he is simply another animal to be gawked at.

Herzog's film illustrates Büchner's point that Woyzeck did not murder Marie simply out of jealousy. His mind was so far gone that he believed that natural elements such as the wind were telling him to kill Marie. When Woyzeck visits the pawnbroker to buy the knife that will become the murder weapon, the broker shows no qualms with selling him the weapon despite suspecting that he will use it to kill himself.<sup>57</sup> This scene further shows the lack of compassion present in German society, as well as the endless greed of capitalist values. Ironically, it is not until after Woyzeck murders Marie that he enters the pub and dances with another woman, and he seems to fit in better with his fellow community members in this scene than any before (until they notice the blood on his sleeve and he becomes a spectacle).<sup>58</sup> His letting go of morality and embracing the evil in his society could be the reason for Woyzeck's seamless integration with his community after murdering Marie. In the end, Marie's death is seen as nothing more than another spectacle, similar to the community fair that everyone crowds around to gawk at. This

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57. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

58. Werner Herzog, *Woyzeck*, (Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Germany, 1979).

extreme form of voyeurism could be another one of Büchner's messages, serving to point out the dark events that give humans a sick sort of pleasure.

Like Büchner's *Woyzeck*, the real Johann Christian Woyzeck was also a seriously troubled person. Having been orphaned by his father at the age of twelve, Woyzeck spent most of his short life doing odd jobs and stealing.<sup>59</sup> However, he was hired as a mercenary by multiple armies during the Napoleonic wars, but returned to his life of traveling and working odd jobs in 1813, in which he was imprisoned multiple times for his thievery.<sup>60</sup> Upon returning to his hometown of Leipzig in 1818, Woyzeck was rejected by his ex-lover Johanna Christiane Woost, who preferred having multiple relationships with other men, which aggravated Woyzeck's alcoholism and tendency towards violence.<sup>61</sup> Woyzeck began physically abusing Woost, and eventually murdered her with a knife at her house after chasing her and one of her lovers there from a nearby park.<sup>62</sup> It was the

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59. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 169.

60. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 168.

61. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 168.

62. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 169.

evening of June 2, 1821, and the police found Woyzeck that very day, and were easily able to get him to confess the murder.<sup>63</sup>

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63. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 169.

## FOUR

THE PROGRESSION OF THE GERMAN JUSTICE SYSTEM AND OTHER SOCIETAL  
CONSIDERATIONS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REGARDING WOYZECK

As with many other societal movements of the 1800s, progress was also being made in Germany's justice system. Social justice advocates of the 1800s, including Büchner, began to protest the death penalty for its archaic form of bringing justice by paying for blood with blood; essentially exacting revenge on criminals in a way that was thought of as bringing about justice by paying back a crime with a seemingly equivalent punishment.<sup>64</sup> Part of the reason for this method of delivering justice is the heavy influence that revenge tragedies of old, including Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, had on German society, seemingly going as far as to influence how the court system ought to administer justice.<sup>65</sup>

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64. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 74.

65. William Shakespeare & George Richard Hibbard, *Hamlet*, (Oxford University Press, 2008).

Freud takes note of the antagonist in Shakespeare's *Richard III* as being a sympathetic or even an empathetic character despite committing horrible atrocities.<sup>66</sup> By suggesting this link between a character in a play and human psychology as it is in reality, Freud echoes Büchner's earlier idea that the study of criminals and their behavior is deserving of more speculation, thought, and psychological analysis than most at the time were willing to give. A court system that simply executes criminals for murdering another human is only logical in the sense that it repays a life lost by taking the life of the one responsible. However, this simple method of dealing "justice" does not take into account any of the reasoning for the murder. This is not to say that murder is ever a justifiable act among citizens living together in a society, but rather that all of the variables contributing to the crime ought to be carefully examined before a sentence is passed. In Johann Woyzeck's case, a psychological analysis should have been conducted before the sentence was carried out.

Not only did Büchner's ideas likely inform and inspire the work of Freud, but also Brecht and the Surrealist movement as a whole.<sup>67</sup> Although darker in his take on human nature and the world we live in, Samuel Beckett's absurdist plays such as *Endgame* and

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66. Sigmund Freud, "Some character-types met with in psycho-analytic work," (In *Handbook of character studies: Psychoanalytic explorations*, Madison, CT, US: International Universities Press, Inc, 1991), 3102.

67. Heiner Müller, et al, *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*, (The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 108.

*Waiting for Godot* also harken back to the dystopian world established in Büchner's *Woyzeck*.<sup>68</sup> Many other parallels can be made between the philosophy, psychology, and theater of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Büchner's criticism of 19<sup>th</sup> century German society in *Woyzeck*. In this way, the play was well ahead of its time, and potentially had a fundamental impact on thinkers in the centuries after it (perhaps subconsciously, considering the unfortunate circumstances of Büchner's death long before it could be finished, published, or produced).

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68. Heiner Müller, et al, *A Heiner Müller Reader: Plays, Poetry, Prose*, (The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 110.



## FIVE

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF GEORG BÜCHNER

Despite the fact that Georg Büchner was born in 1813 in Germany, and died of typhus in 1837 at the young age of 23, he has undoubtedly been perceived as a contemporary by academics and theater practitioners worldwide since his work was introduced to mainstream society in the 1880s.<sup>69</sup> Although his life was relatively short and his body of work is limited, Büchner still managed to cover much ground with his various experiences and unique perspectives in his writings and all three of his short, fragmented plays: *Danton's Death*, *Leonce and Lena*, and *Woyzeck*.<sup>70</sup> Through empathizing and siding with the sick and the lower-class dregs of society, Büchner raised important social justice concerns that would not be accepted by the larger global society until long after his death.

Being Büchner's final play before his untimely death, *Woyzeck* clearly demonstrates his contempt for societal judgement and all of his major criticisms of

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69. Patrick Fortmann, "Introduction: Georg Büchner's Perpetual Contemporaneity," (*Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 81, July 2012) 15.

70. Patrick Fortmann, "Introduction: Georg Büchner's Perpetual Contemporaneity," (*Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 81, July 2012) 15.

Germany during his time. As previously mentioned, the protagonist is subjected to a life of hardship and maltreatment through medical experimentation, the military, and his strained family circumstances. The compounding pressure from these realms in Woyzeck's life cause his mental health to degrade, and his societal outlook to become completely negative and impaired as he slowly loses his mind. As Woyzeck descends into madness, his symptomatology becomes increasingly apparent until he is finally driven to murder his mistress.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps, as Büchner's strongest and most haunting piece, *Woyzeck* expresses Büchner's progressive conceptualizations of mental health and its place and general neglect in the societal context of his time.

*Leonce and Lena* is a more innocent comedy as it would appear, but hides a startling and profound message beneath its surface. The play features a prince and princess arranged to be married who run away from their commitment only to find each other and fall in love anyway.<sup>72</sup> A dark lesson can be taken from this story about the helplessness experienced by all humans when faced with life: no matter how hard we try to control our lives, the outcome is always the same and nothing can truly be affected or changed. This idea found support from absurdists during the surrealist movement of the

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71. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 109.

72. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 75.

1900s, an entire century beyond Büchner's time, which further proves his continuing relevance.

Finally, *Danton's Death* features Büchner's commentary on the French Revolution, which consists of both positive and negative aspects. The play follows Danton, a revolutionary with honorable principles who is ironically executed for questioning the removal of justice in the court system. Mass executions occur due to the devaluing of human life and because of the mandate for a person's execution immediately upon being accused of criminal activity and without due process.<sup>73</sup> This archaic method of "serving justice" is a serious point of contention for Büchner, and is similarly contested in *Woyzeck*, although for different reasons. Having been published in 1835, *Danton's Death* was Büchner's only play to have been published in his lifetime, although it was still not produced until after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its taboo content.<sup>74</sup> Although Büchner's small number of brief works were revolutionary for their time, society would take much longer to catch up with, accept, and echo Büchner's cry for lasting change in the quality and extent of human morality.

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73. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 3.

74. Georg Büchner, *Complete plays and prose*, 1st ed. (C. R. Mueller, Trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), xviii.

## SIX

## GERMANY IN CONTEXT

Shortly after Johann Woyzeck murdered Woost, rumors broke out about his being insane, and Woyzeck's defense pressured Leipzig's public health officer, Johann Christian August Clarus, to give Woyzeck an official medical diagnosis.<sup>75</sup> Clarus was one of the most well-known medical professionals in all of Saxony and he reported that Woyzeck was essentially a trouble maker who had little to no empathy for others, but that he seemed perfectly healthy in all other regards, thus disqualifying him from getting off for potential insanity (although Clarus did recommend a further psychiatric evaluation).<sup>76</sup> This report influenced the court's decision to execute Woyzeck in October of 1821.<sup>77</sup>

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75. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 170.

76. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 170.

77. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 170.

Although the defense filed an objection demanding a second report, the Faculty of Law of Leipzig University came to the same decision on October 29, 1822.<sup>78</sup> However, the death sentence still needed to be approved by King Friedrich August I, and the defense filed for Woyzeck's punishment to be lowered to life in prison, a plea that the king's nephew, Duke Friedrich August of Saxony, urged the king to allow.<sup>79</sup> Still, the king did not change the court's decision, and the defense was left with seven days before the execution to try and change this brutal sentence.<sup>80</sup>

The defense introduced new witnesses that testified in favor of Woyzeck's mental aberrations, but Woyzeck's public health officer did not change the conclusion of his report; and despite his recommendation that Woyzeck be given an evaluation from a psychiatrist, no such thing was done.<sup>81</sup> Despite this long and hard-fought case, Woyzeck was sentenced to death and executed on August 27, 1824 in Leipzig's Market Square.<sup>82</sup>

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78. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 170.

79. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 170.

80. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 171.

81. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 171.

82. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

The massive public following of this intriguing case sparked heated debate among medical practitioners, including Hesse-Darmstadt's district public health officer Ernst Büchner, Georg Büchner's father.<sup>83</sup> As previously mentioned, Georg Büchner's own depression and mental health concerns likely led him to take great interest in this debate, and his play centering on the social justice topic of the execution of mentally ill criminals cemented Woyzeck's case in the annals of medical history.<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps the most profoundly disturbing part of Woyzeck's case is that there were no mental health professionals involved in his psychiatric evaluation, only medical doctors. A modern diagnosis of Woyzeck would likely reveal various psychopathological disorders stemming from Woyzeck's troubled and traumatic past, but no such diagnosis was made in Woyzeck's actual case. This case is a hugely significant landmark in the study of psychiatric disorders, and it demands further investigation and attention so that the same mistakes are never again repeated by an incompetent legal system.

This is the core of Büchner's argument and perhaps his strongest criticism of German society at the time. Unfortunately, it seems that society would not catch up with Büchner's revolutionary thoughts on psychology's role in the greater human context for

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83. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

84. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

at least another fifty years (perhaps starting with Wundt's work in Leipzig in 1879). Büchner's work incorporated elements of Freudian theory, Surrealism, and other 20<sup>th</sup> century movements, despite his dying in 1837, long before any of them even existed.

Although psychiatry did exist as a field in the early 1800s, physicians did not have any central code to abide by, and were instead permitted to treat patients in any way they saw fit.<sup>85</sup> The treating of mental patients by physicians was actually a hugely progressive step for psychological science, as patients had previously been handed over primarily to philosophers and theologians to help solve their problems, but they were still subjected to maltreatment and to sincerely trusted – although ineffective and potentially harmful – treatments that had yet to be empirically tested.<sup>86</sup>

It was the psychological developments made in France that would eventually steer the field to conduct research using stricter empirical methods.<sup>87</sup> Yet, the British methods that dominated Büchner's time did finally adopt more ethical treatment measures for psychological patients, which was one of the central social justice issues that Büchner

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85. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

86. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

87. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

addressed in his body of work.<sup>88</sup> Among these measures were the disallowing of physical restraints, humane patient treatment within the asylums, and the abandonment of harsher, more archaic treatment methods such as isolation and bloodletting.<sup>89</sup>

Although challenging to imagine in modern times, treatment standards were, to say the least, very low for the mentally ill in the early 1800s, and perhaps even comparable to the treatment of inmates kept in high security prisons. One of Büchner's major themes in *Woyzeck* is that societal conditions can have as much to do with a person's mental health, if not more, than variables within that person's control. The appalling treatment of the mentally ill in German society during Büchner's time was no secret to Büchner, and *Woyzeck* very clearly illustrates the possible negative mental health outcomes that this type of extremely severe treatment can have on humans. *Woyzeck* also emphasizes the notion that mentally ill people ought to be regarded as people, nonetheless, who are entitled to the same basic human rights and dignities that the non-mentally ill get to enjoy.

It was primarily through the spreading of ideas brought about by the French Enlightenment in the 1700s that influenced physicians around the world to consider

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88. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.

89. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 172.



potential psychological causes for the various mental disorders witnessed at the time as opposed to suspected physical maladies.<sup>90</sup> However, this period cannot be accredited with the total transition psychology underwent from first being studied through philosophy and faith, to later becoming a science-based practice; for many enlightenment thinkers who laid claim to breakthroughs in the field still clung to Christian ideals that colored their otherwise scientific theories with untestable concepts such as that of the well-being of the soul.<sup>91</sup>

This does not mean that the values of these theorists and practitioners were necessarily “wrong,” but merely that they could not all be tested empirically, which has arguably become the ultimate goal among the modern psychological community. In fact, the religious ethical values that were introduced in the practice of mental health treatment were hugely progressive in terms of patient treatment and the respect for basic human rights.<sup>92</sup>

One might even argue that the idea of the soul is simply an early conception of what we now suspect to be the mind, which is essentially an umbrella term that is meant

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90. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 173.

91. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 173.

92. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 173.

to capture all forms of consciousness in living things. This profound concept has eluded the solid understanding of experts in the field since the conception of psychology as a field of study, and it is undoubtedly one of the most important and necessary latent constructs within the foundation of the field as a whole. How is it that the mind, which is somehow developed and projected by the physical organ that is the brain, is the most essential and useful tools used by macro-organisms, and yet we still lack a solid idea as to where it came from, how it exists, or even what it is exactly? The topic remains a seemingly endless mystery in which we use our own consciousness to think about that same consciousness through a sort of meta-cognition, and yet we still can't seem to use it to figure out where it came from.

It is because of the sort of incomprehensibly impossible questions like this that the subject of psychology exists, and that strict empirical methods alone will likely never be able to provide a perfect answer to all human questioning. However, the pursuit of foundational questions like this is necessary and should be conducted using all available avenues of understanding. Büchner understood this, and despite the establishment of the first humane asylum in Germany that employed occupational therapy techniques in 1811, which was during Büchner's time, more asylums like it would not be established until the middle of the century.<sup>93</sup> Büchner would have seen the development of more humane

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93. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 173.

asylums as a massive victory for his cause, as well as the parallel development of forensic psychiatry that would later be used to more accurately judge mental illnesses among criminals as well as help determine the appropriate punishments for their offenses.<sup>94</sup>

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94. Holger Steinberg, Adrian Schmidt-Recla, & Sebastian Schmideler, "Forensic Psychiatry in Nineteenth-Century Saxony: The Case of Woyzeck," (*Harvard Review Of Psychiatry (Taylor & Francis Ltd)* 15, no. 4, July 2007), 173.

## SEVEN

CONCLUSION – IMPLICATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS FROM A MODERN  
PERSPECTIVE

Although Büchner's *Woyzeck* is considered by some to be one of the first modern dramas, containing elements of both tragedy and comedy, its central themes remain relevant to this day.<sup>95</sup> Büchner's work addressed issues faced by the common folk while implementing avant-garde elements to portray real world imagery.<sup>96</sup> However, Büchner also manages to maintain the scientific skepticism from his education as a physician, utilizing his broad intellectual capabilities to comment on the many realms of society including religion, politics, and science in his work.<sup>97</sup>

In order to accurately portray Büchner's *Woyzeck* in performance, it is essential to understand the many societal perspectives his play addresses, as well as the various mental disorders *Woyzeck* may have developed across the hardships of his life. His

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95. Patrick Fortmann, "Introduction: Georg Büchner's Perpetual Contemporaneity," (*Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 81, July 2012), 289.

96. H. Müller-Sievers, "Reading without Interpreting: German Textual Criticism and the Case of Georg Büchner," (*Modern Philology*, 103(4), 2006), 518.

97. Patrick Fortmann, "Introduction: Georg Büchner's Perpetual Contemporaneity," (*Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 81, July 2012), 16.

humble beginning as an orphan moving between foster families could have led him to form insecure attachments in his personal relationships.<sup>98</sup> His time as a soldier could have inflicted serious trauma to Woyzeck's psyche, or even caused him to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>99</sup> Also, Woyzeck's many criminal offenses and general trouble-making might suggest that he had some form of Antisocial Personality Disorder, as well as other sociopathic tendencies (his strong emotional feelings throughout the play and in Johann Woyzeck's real life, especially towards his spouse/partner, suggest that he is more likely a sociopath than a psychopath).<sup>100</sup> Woyzeck's manic and depressive symptomatology throughout the play also suggests that he has Manic Depressive Disorder.<sup>101</sup> Finally, Woyzeck's paranoid delusions would likely classify him as a paranoid schizophrenic if diagnosed using modern psychological assessments (Moritz, Steffen, & Woodward, 193, 2005).<sup>102</sup> When considering Woyzeck's many hardships, it becomes much more likely that the development of any of these disorders could have

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98. Michelle A. Stinehart, David A. Scott, Hannah G. Barfield, 2012. "Reactive Attachment Disorder in Adopted and Foster Care Children: Implications for Mental Health Professionals," (*Family Journal* 20, no. 4, 2012), 355.

99. Linda J. Schupp, *Assessing and Treating Trauma and PTSD*, (Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media, 2015) 1.

100. Christopher H. Rosik, 1998. "Diagnosis and treatment of sociopaths and clients with sociopathic traits," (*Journal Of Psychology And Christianity* 17, no. 1, 1998) 89.

101. Michael A. Sommers, *Everything You Need to Know About Bipolar Disorder and Manic Depressive Illness*, (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2000) 11.

102. Steffen Moritz & Todd S. Woodward, "Jumping to conclusions in delusional and non-delusional schizophrenic patients," (*British Journal Of Clinical Psychology* 44, no. 2, 2005) 193.

compounded on each other, thus leaving Woyzeck vulnerable to develop many of them comorbidly.

However, these and the other potential and various disorders possessed by Johann Woyzeck can only amount to speculation on Büchner's part, given that Johann Woyzeck was never administered a formal psychological assessment (not to mention the lack of understanding of these complex mental disorders at the time). Despite this, I will take advantage of this modern knowledge of psychological science to inform my portrayal of Woyzeck. Both the research I have conducted on the real and fictitious versions of Woyzeck in this thesis will help me better understand Büchner's character in order to perform it accurately and effectively in the performance component of my thesis.

As mentioned by Freud when discussing Aristotle's *Poetics*, there are a few different purposes that performing theater serves in society. Not only does it provide a cathartic release for actors and audience members alike, but it also helps us develop empathy for others through exploring perspectives that differ greatly from our own; as well as allows us the opportunity to rehearse events that could occur in real life in a space that is safe and free of most of the consequences or implications of real life situations.<sup>103</sup> For these reasons, theatrical performance is absolutely necessary if a society is to have any hope of functioning to its maximum potential. If we are to learn and take advantage

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103. Sigmund Freud & Henry Alden Bunker, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," (*The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1960), 145.

of everything performance has to teach us, then society has the best chance of undergoing moral progression. I hope to utilize these practical functions of theater in my performance of *Woyzeck* to further explore, understand, and empathize with Woyzeck, in addition to helping my audience accomplish these tasks.

In conclusion, Büchner's *Woyzeck* not only sheds light on the real case of Johann Woyzeck's life and struggles, but it also serves as a review and criticism of Büchner's contemporary society on many different levels. I hope to utilize and channel the knowledge gained from the in-depth research of this thesis during my performative portrayal of Büchner's *Woyzeck* in order to gain an even fuller understanding of the play and its lasting relevance in modern society.

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#### Additional Resources

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