

MHRA TEXTS AND DISSERTATIONS

VOLUME 16

*Georg Büchner's  
'Dantons Tod':  
A Reappraisal*

DOROTHY JAMES

THE MODERN HUMANITIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

MODERN HUMANITIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

TEXTS AND DISSERTATIONS

*(formerly Dissertation Series)*

VOLUME 16

*Editor*

H. B. NISBET

*(Germanic)*

Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*:  
A Reappraisal

GEORG BÜCHNER'S  
*DANTONS TOD:*  
A REAPPRAISAL

DOROTHY JAMES

*Associate Professor of German in Hunter College  
City University of New York*

LONDON  
THE MODERN HUMANITIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION  
1982

This PDF scan of this work is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0  
© Modern Humanities Research Association 2024

ISBN 978-1-83954-653-2  
doi:10.59860/td.b6b420a

*Published by*

**The Modern Humanities Research Association**

**Honorary Treasurer, MHRA**

**KING'S COLLEGE, STRAND  
LONDON WC2R 2LS  
ENGLAND**

**ISBN 0 900547 77 4**

**© The Modern Humanities Research Association 1982**

This publication is copyright under the Berne Convention and the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved. Apart from any copying under the UK Copyright Act 1956, part 1, section 7, whereby a single copy of an article may be supplied, under certain conditions, for the purpose of research or private study, by a library of a class prescribed by the UK Board of Trade Regulations (Statutory Instruments, 1957, No. 868), no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the prior permission of the copyright owners. Permission is not required to copy abstracts of papers or articles on condition that a full reference to the source is shown.

*Multiple copying of the contents of the publication without permission is always illegal.*

*Printed in England by*  
**W. S. MANEY & SON LIMITED**  
HUDSON ROAD LEEDS

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Note . . . . .	.viii
Introduction. . . . .	1
Chapter I The Invented Characters of <i>Dantons Tod</i> . . . . .	7
1. The Mob . . . . .	8
2. The Whores . . . . .	14
3. The Wives . . . . .	21
Chapter II The Historical Characters of <i>Dantons Tod</i> : Dantonists and Robespierrists . . . . .	29
1. Dantonist Politics . . . . .	29
2. Heroes or Villains . . . . .	35
Chapter III Danton and Robespierre: Historical Antagonists . . . . .	41
1. The Confrontation of Virtue and Vice. . . . .	41
2. Robespierre's 'Tugend' and Robespierre's Politics . . . . .	45
3. The Private Agony of Two Revolutionaries. . . . .	49
4. Coherent Antagonists? . . . . .	54
Chapter IV St Just: a Dual Role. . . . .	58
1. The Politician St Just, and his Speech on Nature and Time . . . . .	58
2. Büchner's Scientific View of Nature . . . . .	64
Chapter V Questions of Coherence in Motivation and Characterization. . . . .	70
1. The Complications of History . . . . .	70
2. The Complications of Religion. . . . .	75
3. Attempted Resolutions. . . . .	81
Chapter VI Büchner's Private Danton . . . . .	86
1. How Many Dantons? . . . . .	86

	PAGE
2. Danton's 'Extreme Pessimism' . . . . .	91
3. Danton and Büchner . . . . .	99
<b>Conclusion The Undercurrent of Büchner's Thought . . . . .</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Notes . . . . .</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Bibliography . . . . .</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Index . . . . .</b>	<b>135</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my considerable debt to Professor Ronald Peacock. He gave the initial impetus to this study of Büchner, and he continued over a number of years to offer patient advice and unfailing encouragement. My thanks go also to Miss Margaret Jacobs whose meticulous examination of the work in its original form, when it was presented for the Ph.D. degree of the University of London, was extremely helpful and totally constructive. In the final stages of preparing this study for publication, I am indebted to Professor H.B. Nisbet for his excellent editorial advice.

My work on the scientific thought of Büchner was encouraged and informed by the interest of Professor Thomas B. Settle, historian of science, with whom I worked for some years in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Polytechnic Institute of New York. His careful reading of Chapter IV in particular, his advice and suggestions contributed materially to the study as it finally emerged.

Of the librarians who have helped me, I would like above all to thank Dr Erich Zimmermann of the Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek whose valuable assistance on a number of occasions enabled me to take the greatest possible advantage of the fine collection of materials in the Büchner-Archiv in Darmstadt. I wish to acknowledge also years of assistance from the New York Public Library.

Finally I wish to thank most warmly my old friend Patricia Place for all her efforts in preparation of the typescript at various junctures in this work.

New York 1980

Dorothy James

## NOTE

Throughout this book Büchner's writings are quoted from the edition by Werner R. Lehmann, *Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Christian Wegner Verlag, Hamburg: Vol. I, 1967; Vol. II, 1971).



To  
THOMAS B. SETTLE

By the same author:

Dorothy Prohaska, *Raimund and Vienna: A Critical Study of Raimund's Plays in their Viennese Setting* (Cambridge, 1970)

## INTRODUCTION

This study of Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod* began as an analysis of what motivates the characters of Büchner's literary works. It soon became clear that *Dantons Tod* presented problems of characterization on a different order of magnitude from those of the works which followed, not least because it was Büchner's first play, and a very ambitious one. He poured into it a welter of youthful ideas and emotions, and there is no such integration of character, mood, idea, and setting as one finds later in the more limited and unified works. My analysis of motivation in *Dantons Tod* grew therefore to unexpected proportions, becoming a full-scale reappraisal of this turbulent first drama.

There was a specific reason for approaching Büchner's work through a study of how he chose to motivate his characters. The slender volume of this young man's writing has for more than a century provoked profound and often impassioned critical controversy. Ronald Peacock, writing in the 1950s, pointed to what he called 'an oppressive unresolved problem in Büchner criticism, seen most clearly in the way that critical views, falling roughly into two groups, the metaphysical and the sociological, are too deliberately opposed to each other, too exclusive, too intent on a unitary system of thought in one direction or another'. Peacock, himself avoiding a purely 'metaphysical' or 'sociological' approach, suggested that in *Dantons Tod* in particular there was much that was in fact fundamentally unclarified if one tried to make it fit into a neat logical pattern in relation to Büchner's own political activities and declared opinions. It was, in Peacock's view, more helpful to regard the play as an un-unified work, to regard Danton, not as one coherently thought-out character, but as two Dantons – the historical Danton and Büchner's private Danton.<sup>1</sup>

Peacock's essay has been reprinted several times and widely quoted, but the tendency has been to regard it as the common-sense view of a 'pragmatic Englishman'<sup>2</sup> and thus sometimes to condescend to it, grouping it, as Knapp does in his recent critical bibliography, with the opinions of other 'Anglo-Saxon' critics and the German critic Sengle, who suggest that *Dantons Tod* is not a heterogeneous play.<sup>3</sup> Such a view shows, according to Knapp, 'daß sie es an einem nicht mehr adäquaten Maßstab zu messen versuchen: nämlich dem der klassischen Tragödie, wo die Zuordnung aller Teile auf das innere Zentrum des dramatischen Gefüges formales wie inhaltliches Postulat darstellte'. This kind of argument seems to me to be talking past Peacock's view, rather than addressing it. Peacock was not measuring *Dantons Tod* by the yardstick of classical tragedy and finding it structurally

wanting, form and content failing to cohere around a dramatic centre. He was saying quite simply that Danton, as portrayed in *Dantons Tod*, did not make sense as a coherent character, that the thought of *Dantons Tod* did not make sense as a 'unitary system of thought', that one might understand the play, and consequently the whole of Büchner's work, better, if one faced up to the essential disunity of *Dantons Tod*, recognizing it as a 'a symptom of Büchner's philosophical and of his poetic-dramatic immaturity' (p.185).

Giorgio Dolfini, sharing Peacock's point of view, puts the matter even more bluntly when he writes:

Nella *Morte di Danton* non crediamo di poter leggere un chiaro messaggio quale successivamente e contraddittoriamente hanno letto molti critici tedeschi. Ci sembra che, in definitiva, quei critici, abbagliati dal genio prepotente di Büchner, abbiano sopravvalutato la *Morte di Danton*, non abbiano visto in essa i segni di un'incertezza ovvero di una pur geniale immaturità espressiva. (p.67)

Much Büchner criticism is indeed marked, as Dolfini suggests, by attempts to read in *Dantons Tod* a 'clear message' of various kinds, some of which flatly contradict others. It seemed to me that the real usefulness of Peacock's approach to this problem through the two Dantons, through the possibility, that is, of a fundamental lack of unity in Büchner's Danton, had not been exploited in subsequent criticism. Büchner's 'message' had been much debated, the form of his drama much discussed, but less attention had been paid to the analysis of his characters as literary creations, as beings supposedly motivated within given dramatic settings and situations.<sup>4</sup> Do they make sense? Are they coherent? Has Büchner really thought out what he is doing with them? These questions, direct and simple as they are, seemed to me to be worth asking. New answers to them might even contribute to a re-phrasing of Büchner's 'message'.

As soon as one begins asking the question of what motivates the characters of Büchner's first play, one encounters the immediate complication that they are not altogether Büchner's characters. Most of them belong also to history. Similarly, of course, both Lenz and Woyzeck have their 'real life' counterparts, and in *Lenz*, as in *Dantons Tod*, Büchner has drawn on the writings of others for parts of his own actual text. *Dantons Tod* involves, however, a much more complex interweaving of source-materials with Büchner's own writing. In *Lenz*, he drew on Oberlin's diaries, and one can see at a glance what is Oberlin and what is Büchner when the two narratives are presented side by side.<sup>5</sup> In *Dantons Tod*, he drew on a number of different sources, and critics are still scouring the literature of the French Revolution for more. The standard method of presenting this material is by necessity quite different from the *Lenz*/Oberlin presentation. The critics who have diligently sought out historic parallels to Büchner's text in *Dantons Tod* clearly cannot present the source-materials in their own varied contexts alongside Büchner's excerpts from these materials in their context. One would need,

practically speaking, a very large book in order to do this. What Viëtor did, in his pioneering article on Büchner's sources in 1933, was to place side by side in two columns the passages from *Dantons Tod* and the relevant source passages, which amounted in his estimation to one sixth of the play.<sup>6</sup> The overwhelming impression made by this presentation is that which Viëtor himself later described: 'Er [Büchner] hält sich eng an die Geschichtsbücher.'<sup>7</sup> Richard Thieberger supplemented the researches of Viëtor in his edition of *La Mort de Danton* in 1953, discovering some new references in the same sources, and presenting a very comprehensive list of these, annotated to the corresponding lines in Büchner's play.<sup>8</sup> These quotations are again for obvious reasons taken out of context, and identified only by the title of the work in which they appear, not by actual time, place, or speaker. Thieberger's list has become the standard one used by scholars in the field of Büchner studies, and has been supplemented in recent years by the work of Adolf Beck and Thomas Mayer. Beck suggested in 1963 several new sources, all of which Mayer has since disputed.<sup>9</sup> Mayer's own researches are based firmly and sensibly on the conviction that Büchner had neither the time nor the leisure to unearth numerous historical documents, and that he probably used not more but less than those already postulated. Mayer has worked more exhaustively than previous critics on *Unsere Zeit*, and has suggested some possible new sources, but remains convinced that another one more comprehensive source work may yet be discovered.<sup>10</sup>

Even the most obvious borrowings of Büchner from historical sources add up to an impressive list, and it is small wonder that most critics have followed in the steps of Viëtor in regarding *Dantons Tod* in large part as realistic, that is, 'wirklichkeitstreu' in the sense of 'quellentreu'.<sup>11</sup> Viëtor's own very strong opinion on the subject, 'Büchner ist voller Ehrfurcht, man möchte sagen: er ist fromm dem Wirklichen gegenüber', is still quoted approvingly in discussions of Büchner's realism, his attitude to history, and his use of sources.<sup>12</sup> It is often supported, as Viëtor himself supported it, by reference to Büchner's own equally strong statements on the subject:

Der dramatische Dichter ist in meinen Augen nichts, als ein Geschichtsschreiber . . . Seine höchste Aufgabe ist, der Geschichte, wie sie sich wirklich begeben, so nahe als möglich zu kommen. (II,443)

These sentences are themselves not infrequently quoted thus, entirely out of context, as a programmatic statement of Büchner's artistic intent. Certain critics have wisely drawn attention to their immediate and clearly significant context, namely the very defensive letter which the young Büchner was writing to his parents in elaborate justification of the 'Unsittlichkeit' of *Dantons Tod*; the above quotation is preceded by and should surely be read in conjunction with the words: 'Was übrigens die sogenannte Unsittlichkeit meines Buches angeht, so habe ich Folgendes zu antworten. . .'. It has been pointed out that the entire passage is not in fact very convincing as a justification for 'Unsittlichkeit' since after all Büchner was

under no obligation to choose that particular chapter of 'immoral' history for his play.<sup>13</sup> Less critical attention has been paid to the fact that 'history as it really happened' is a much harder thing to pin down than the young Büchner implied in his rather self-righteous apologia to his parents. Historical characters 'as they really were' differ fairly considerably in the eye of the beholder.<sup>14</sup>

In my own attempt to analyse the characters of *Dantons Tod*, it seemed important to go back to the main sources themselves and examine Büchner's quotations in their original context.<sup>15</sup> When one does so, one realizes that he was reading history as a variety of rather differently placed individuals thought it really happened. He had little choice but to select, to synthesize, to shape the materials in front of him. The question for me in attempting to analyse his characters was not so much: did he present history as it really happened? as: how did he deal with the various glimpses of history which he encountered? This turned out to be a far-reaching inquiry, and is pursued throughout the book in the course of examining the characters themselves.

As one begins, in *Dantons Tod*, to identify Büchner's manipulation of historical threads in the texture of his characterization, it becomes easier to disentangle what he has himself woven into that texture. One such personal thread led me into another far-reaching inquiry which expanded the scope and implications of my analysis. In exploring the motivation of the characters, I was consistently impressed with an emphasis on the physical, the instinctual aspects of human character, which derived, it seemed, much less from accounts of the French Revolution than from the set of the writer's own mind. Investigating this, I was obliged to take seriously that important but little understood side of Büchner's life and personality which was bound up with his studies of medicine, of anatomy and physiology, and with his childhood and adolescence in the house of a doctor active in medical research.

When one turns for help to secondary literature, one finds a relatively small amount of material on the subject – exceedingly small in comparison with materials on his political and literary work.<sup>16</sup> Some discussions of Büchner's actual research in comparative anatomy are extremely helpful to the layman who is trying to understand it,<sup>17</sup> but if one goes a step further and looks for enlightenment on possible connexions between this and his other activities, then one has little success, writers on both sides being quite reasonably cautious about venturing into unfamiliar territory.<sup>18</sup> Yet it seems clear on the face of it that the young man who wrote three plays and a 'Novelle', a thesis and a lecture in comparative anatomy all in the space of the last two years of his short life could not himself have kept his scientific and literary work in two separate compartments of his mind. One becomes even more convinced of this, when one turns to the works of physiologists and anatomists which Büchner as a student might well have consulted, when one begins to absorb the kinds of problems with which such men were grappling – problems of how the mind worked, what the nervous system was, how men, animals, the

physical world at large had evolved into their present forms. It becomes increasingly clear that such speculation was just as influential in shaping the young Büchner's ideas as the works of philosophers and poets.<sup>19</sup>

We are so accustomed to the stereotyped identification of science with 'fact' and literature with 'fiction' that it is easy to overlook the intensely speculative nature of much that is called science, and the part which the speculations of science might play in literature. Critics caught up in familiar dichotomies have used words of Büchner's own to bolster notions of a 'day and night' difference between his scientific and literary activities. He wrote, for example, a quite literal description of his work in Zürich, at a time when he was a young lecturer in comparative anatomy and having to prepare fresh specimens for his classes himself: 'Ich sitze am Tage mit dem Scalpell und die Nacht mit den Büchern.'<sup>20</sup> 'By day, the materialist scientist', comments Guerrieri, in passing, 'by night, the visionary',<sup>21</sup> as if it were not possible for science to involve vision or for books to be scientific. We are all trapped to some extent in the stereotypes of the language itself: terms such as 'creative writing' and 'research science', which one can scarcely avoid, themselves imply basic distinctions between the two activities. But a good deal more than stereotyped language is involved when, for example, Walter Müller-Seidel, in one of the most serious existing attempts to come to terms with the influence of Büchner's science on his literature, insists on a fundamental separation of the two activities, a separation of scientific 'truth' from the 'truth' of art (p.212), and tries to demonstrate that ultimately Büchner's 'Freude am Schaffen', that is, his literary creativity, in some sense wins over his scientific method.<sup>22</sup>

For my own part, I have tried in my analysis of Büchner's work to avoid those thought-patterns which automatically slot science and literature into different and even opposing categories, and to read the literary and scientific works as products of one mind. The necessity of attempting such an integrated reading of *Dantons Tod* in what began as a study of the motivation of its characters arose out of my growing conviction that one could not fully discuss Büchner's creation of dramatic characters without confronting his views of man, views shaped by many things, including his science. The apparently straightforward questions therefore with which I approached Büchner's works – Do the characters make sense? Why do they do the things they do? – led me in the course of the book to a discussion of Büchner's thought as it emerges from the complex patchwork of drama, history, and speculation which he called *Dantons Tod*.



## CHAPTER I

### THE INVENTED CHARACTERS OF *DANTONS TOD*

The obvious conflict in *Dantons Tod*, that is, the core of the action as well as the clash of conflicting ideas and personalities, lies in the interaction of the two apparent antagonists, Danton and Robespierre. The conflict cannot be described simply as a personal one between the two men. They are locked in a personal conflict of sorts, but it is interwoven with the political conflict which took place historically between them and between their two surrounding clusters of secondary revolutionary figures, each of whom bears the name and some recognizable characteristics of a historical counterpart. The political conflict between the two groups, made explicit in the first scene of the play, has a clear historical base: Hébert and the extreme faction of revolutionaries known as the 'ultras' have been executed: Danton and his friends have become, at this late stage in their revolutionary careers, 'moderates', that is, they have for a short time been urging a brake on the killing set in motion by the revolution, while Robespierre and his friends are still thundering the rhetoric of terror and continued revolution. The personal and political complexities of what was in fact a three-way struggle between the two factions and Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety are largely missing from the play, but the final stages of the struggle, when only the Dantonists were left to fight it out with the Robespierrists, are, in a rudimentary way, taken over into *Dantons Tod*.

This historic conflict, then, is the obvious starting point for an examination of Büchner's characters, their individual and group motivation. The Dantonists in the play *are* motivated by the desire to end unnecessary bloodshed; at all events, they express this desire in the dialogue, just as Robespierre and St Just express their desire to complete the revolution. When one looks for these explicit expressions, however, one finds that they are surprisingly sparse.<sup>1</sup> Danton makes such a statement briefly in his interview with Robespierre, and in a few lines in his last appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Otherwise one searches the play in vain for outright statements of his moderate political position. One can read political, but also psychological motives into his statement, 'Ich will lieber guillotiniert werden, als guillotiniert lassen' (II.1.32), or into his regrets at having created the Revolutionary Tribunal: 'Ich bitte Gott und Menschen dafür um Verzeihung, ich wollte neuen Septembermorden zuvorkommen' (III.3.52). Both these statements, as it turns out, come directly from the historical sources where they are



not without their ambiguities – ambiguities which are compounded when we find them on the lips of a fictional Danton. The same applies to a number of ‘historic’ political statements of our fictional Robespierre, and this is perhaps not the least of reasons why many critics who set out on the well-worn path of argument concerning the political and temperamental clash between Danton and Robespierre find themselves embroiled in contradictions of one kind or another, which can only be resolved by ignoring some elements in the text and pressing some others into unlikely service. It seems worthwhile, then, to look at the play again, and to see if there is an alternative approach to the grouping of characters which might provide a new way into the subject.

They fall, functionally, into two quite different groups: on the one hand, the leading revolutionaries and their women, and on the other hand, the street-people, the mob, the *sansculottes* and their women. These groups appear for the most part in separate episodes, the leading revolutionaries making only rare appearances in the streets, and the street-people making practically no appearances in the salons, the clubs, and the prison-cells of the leading revolutionaries. Only the prostitutes are an exception: they do in fact cross the line, and are shown in actual conversation with Danton and his friends, who never exchange a serious word in the whole play with a *sansculotte* of the male variety. I would tend to regard them therefore as a unique group of characters, although they are, to a large extent, treated in the criticism as part of the ‘Volk’ in general. The entire complex of scenes surrounding them and the other representatives of the common people, seems mainly to be regarded as providing local Revolutionary colour, sometimes political emphasis, sometimes comic relief, and almost always ‘realistic detail’. There is a nice paradox in this since they are in a sense the most purely imagined characters in the play, being based in no way on real historic personages. This is particularly true in the case of the prostitutes. The ‘mob’ does figure in some generalized form in the sources, but it is surely a misapprehension to think that Büchner is being ‘realistic’ in the sense of ‘true to his sources’ when he shows Danton and his friends dallying with prostitutes in those last crucial days before their imprisonment.

Büchner, then, who knew his sources well enough, chose deliberately to pepper the action with invented prostitutes as well as with unknown *sansculottes*. Instead of dismissing or even applauding them as ‘realistic detail’, it is of more interest to consider them as characters in their own right. Purely invented characters as they are, they present us with a simpler problem, a clearer point of departure than the semi-historical, semi-fictional characters in the forefront of the play.

### 1. *The Mob*

The first ‘Volksszene’ (I.2.12) breaks upon the stage with some violence after the fine talk of Danton and his friends in their gaming room (I.1). Simon, described in the cast-list as a prompter, is beating his wife and heaping abuse on her head. He is accusing his daughter of being a whore with the connivance of her mother.

The wife defends her daughter as being the breadwinner of the family, and a bystander supports her eventually with the words, 'Was that sie? Nichts! Ihr Hunger hurt und bettelt' (I.2.14). Considering these brutal facts, it is noteworthy that the incident can be unblinkingly described as comic relief – 'a more or less comic family scene', says Knight (Knight, p.73) – and included among those scenes which are commonly said to provide comic relief in the Shakespearean tradition. Certainly it is intended to be comic, one might also say comic in the fairground tradition. Characters providing comic relief in the style of Hanswurst traditionally do such things as hit each other, take their trousers down, indulge in coarse mime and scatological puns. They are also traditionally of the lower classes and clumsily ape their social superiors. Büchner's Simon, with his coarse talk, his brutish behaviour, his convenient but highly unlikely profession of stage-prompter which allows him to break into uncharacteristic blank verse and quotations from Hamlet, is a primitive stage caricature who makes the audience laugh, as do the other citizens who add to the fun by making coarse jokes. This kind of comedy, never anything but primitive, can be extremely feeble.<sup>2</sup> Simon is the only *sansculotte* who appears in more than one scene, but he is not developed in any sense as a believable character. Simon and the citizen soldiers who go to arrest Danton pack three obscene punning exchanges into a short twenty-line dialogue (II.6.42). The prison-warder of Dillon and Laflotte is drunk, and – how uproarious – has wet his breeches (III.5.42). The conversation between the carters on the way to the guillotine (IV.5.68) ranges from such trivia as,

'Wer hat euch herfahren geheißen?'  
'Ich heiße nicht Herfahren, das ist ein kurioser Namen',

to the inevitable sexual joke,

'Um ein Mädél fährt man nit herum, immer in die  
Mitt 'nein'.

Whether or not one considers such lines guaranteed to bring the house down, one can see at a glance that Büchner has made no attempt in these scenes to draw interesting individually motivated characters 'aus dem Volk'. It is important to state this explicitly, even though it is so obvious that scarcely a critic would pretend that Büchner is attempting to do this. Some are, however, prepared to suggest that he has drawn a convincingly motivated collective 'Volk', yet as soon as one looks at such characters as Simon, and compares them with, say, Woyzeck – a character drawn by Büchner when he was indeed concentrating on understanding and creating individual characters 'aus dem Volk' – then one sees Simon and his friends, individually, as comic caricatures, hastily devised by a young playwright new to the trade. He wants to present the 'Volk' in his play; he also wants to provide comic relief in the style of the great Shakespeare, so he falls into the easy expedient of running these two impulses together into the inevitable stereotype of coarsely comic low-class buffoons. Not only does he not create believable individual

characters, but it is hard to see how, by this method, he could create a believable mass portrait of the 'Volk', still less, as has been suggested, a realistic portrait of the Paris mob at the time of the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

There are two points in the play at which his obviously genuine desire to depict the 'Volk' diverges from his comic impulse and begins to overcome the stereotype. Out of the ranks of the citizens in the first 'Volksszene' emerges a man, Erster Bürger, who is stirred by the case of the 'arme Hure' and those who whore with the daughters of the people, denouncing them in the language, no longer of the clod-hopping stage buffoon, but of the political agitator, or to be more precise, of the *Hessische Landbote*:

Weh über die, so mit den Töchtern des Volkes huren! Ihr habt Kollern im Leib und sie haben Magendrücken, ihr habt Löcher in den Jacken und sie haben warme Röcke, ihr habt Schwielen in den Fäusten und sie haben Sammhände. (I.2.14)

This simple biblically flavoured oratory, of the kind which Büchner and Weidig had imagined would appeal to the peasants of Hesse, is a strange contrast to the rather silly crude jokes which precede it, but it is natural that the young Büchner should fairly automatically resort to it in imagining a speech to stir up his down-trodden people of Paris. One does not find this style of language in the literature of the French Revolution – neither the Paris mob, after all, nor their orators were brought up on Luther's Bible – but while it is therefore 'unrealistic' in its context, it has a compelling strength and conviction of its own and it builds up to a convincing atmosphere of collective anger. Hungry people do turn in violence upon their leaders, and seek immediate scapegoats on whom they may vent their anger. The anger of the citizens is aroused against 'them', the 'Spitzbuben', and when a young man who happens to have a handkerchief enters upon the scene, they are ready to hang him as an aristocrat.<sup>4</sup>

This scene is the most sustained encounter with the people in the play, and out of the initial buffoonery has emerged one serious political question: the people are poor and hungry – what are the revolutionary leaders doing for them other than cutting off heads? The theme of 'heads for bread' is a common one in the writings of the period, usually phrased with indignation at the notion of such a substitution – 'Will man uns mit Menschenfleisch speisen und mit Blut tränken?'<sup>5</sup> – but expressed here by the militant Erster Bürger as a cry for the blood of those who buy the flesh of the wives and daughters of the people and fail to give the people bread; it is an attack on the leaders of the revolution, an accusation that they have gained materially while the people starve. When Robespierre appears, he addresses them as, 'Armes, tugendhaftes Volk!', a historic phrase, and, historically, not only a rhetorical phrase used for effect; the poor virtuous people were the cornerstone of Robespierre's hopes for the Revolution (whether one construes these hopes as selfish ambition or as social altruism).<sup>6</sup> Büchner's Robespierre uses the phrase, and follows it with rather hollow-sounding references to the people's enemies,

undefined, who want them to destroy themselves, and to their lawgivers and brothers who will destroy these enemies. The wheel set in motion in this scene comes full circle in the short mob scene of Act III (10.63). The enemies of the people, i.e. the whore-mongers and the newly-rich, have by now been fully identified as the Dantonists, and brought to trial; Danton has made his last appeal to the Tribunal. Some of his words in this appeal are derived straight from the historical accounts, but its climax and conclusion are Büchner's and take us back to the primitively delineated world of the *Erster Bürger*: 'Ihr wollt Brod und sie werfen euch Köpfe hin. Ihr durstet und sie machen euch das Blut von den Stufen der Guillotine lecken' (III.9.63).

From this conclusion, Büchner can move naturally into his next scene, a purely invented mob scene with the citizens crying, 'Ja, das ist wahr, Köpfe statt Brod, Blut statt Wein'. This time the crowd is not calling bloodthirstily for this kind of retribution, but following Danton's line and denouncing it bitterly as a false solution to their actual problems. They begin by blaming the revolutionaries who are throwing them heads for bread, but rapidly turn about again. Who is taking the people's bread? Danton has been accused by the virtuous Robespierre; Danton has fine clothes, he has a fine house and a fine wife. He bathes in Burgundy and eats venison on silver plates. He sleeps with the wives and daughters of the people when he is drunk. His wealth is new and comes from the King, the Duke of Orleans, foreign powers. Robespierre by contrast has nothing. And the crowd forgets the 'heads for bread' argument, and calls for the head of the vicious Danton in the name of the virtuous Robespierre.

This description of the people's reactions is wholly Büchner's invention. There is nothing in his known sources on any verbal response of the Paris mob to the condemnation of Danton. The strong implication in the accounts of Thiers, Mignet, and *Unsere Zeit* is that the execution of the Dantonists had to be hurried along because Danton's eloquence before the Tribunal was swinging public opinion in his favour, that during the hearings, the throng around the palace was 'singulièrement émue', that crowds at the execution, usually jubilant and noisy, were silent, except for the 'troupe infâme', paid, according to Thiers, to follow the tumbrils and taunt the prisoners.<sup>7</sup> It is Büchner who chooses to show the people motivated here, as in the earlier scene, by anger against the luxurious, the sinful, the corrupt; it is Büchner who from the outset sets the tone of this anger, and with it the tone of the people's virtue, by leading into it through the case of the whoring daughter: 'A knife for the people who buy the flesh of our wives and daughters' (I.2.14), nowhere mentioned in the sources as a grievance of the people: it is Büchner who chooses to show them swayed hither and yon by *ad hominem* oratory, not convinced by political argument. Neither his Robespierre nor his Danton attempts to give the people any indication of how he proposes to provide bread for the people rather than heads. The impression left therefore by these two very slight sketches of the people in their relationships with their political

leaders is not only that the crowd is easily swayed, but that their leaders think more in terms of swaying them to save their own heads than of actually doing anything for them. Lacroix sums up his view of Robespierre's handling of the people early on in the play:

Die Sache ist einfach, man hat die Atheisten und Ultrarevolutionärs aufs Schafott geschickt; aber dem Volk ist nicht geholfen es läuft noch barfuß in den Gassen und will sich aus Aristocratenleder Schuhe machen. Der Guillotinenthermometer darf nicht fallen, noch einige Grade und der Wohlfahrtsausschuß kann sich sein Bett auf dem Revolutionsplatz suchen. (1.4.20)

The executions, in these terms, are Robespierre's way of keeping the guillotine-thermometer up and the people under control. There is no sense in the appearances of the people, as engineered by Büchner, that Robespierre is doing anything other than this, that he might, for example, really be trying to rid the republic of forces which were a danger to the sovereignty of the people. Büchner's 'people' opt, on the basis of demagogic personal accusations, for Robespierre's known virtue and austerity and against Danton's alleged vice and luxury. This is all very well as a dramatist's view of what is going on. If Büchner wants to present a cynical view of the leaders of the revolution playing on the prejudices of a foolish people, then he has a perfect right to do so. But is he consistent in wanting to do this?

It seems to me that the situation is much more confused, that he has not really worked out even for himself what 'the people' as an entity in the French Revolution were. The sources which he read vary in their attitudes to 'le peuple', their role in the Revolution and their ability, real or potential, to participate in the decision-making processes of government, but on the whole the picture which emerges is a negative one. Bernd Zöllner has made a useful analysis of Thiers's and Mignet's attitude to the people, concluding that Thiers had less faith in the people's educability than Mignet, and that his scornful attitude shows itself in his tendency to describe them as disturbers of the peace, undisciplined barbarians, the mob, etc. (Zöllner, pp. 28 ff.). This attitude is certainly common enough in prison memoirs: Mercier is particularly vicious about them in his introduction to *Le Nouveau Paris* where he talks about 'la boue de Paris', 'la canaille', 'cette horde infernale', etc.<sup>8</sup> Certainly the question of whether 'le peuple' was the hero of the revolution or 'la canaille' its downfall has been a vexed one for historians ever since, and one would not expect the young Büchner to have solved it. Still, there is a problem for critics in explaining why he, the author of the *Hessische Landbote*, should have depicted the Paris crowds with, as Knight puts it, 'a kind of aristocratic contempt' (p.91). Knight makes the suggestion that he clearly depicted the crowds as 'inconstant, unreliable, easily swayed, foolish, comic, diseased and dirty', but does not hold them morally responsible for their nature. They are as they are, because of their economic misery. Knight is seeing the 'Volk' in the play as one entity, but in fact, while the obvious buffoons – Simon and his fellows – fall under Knight's cover-all description, the Erster Bürger of Act I and the Zweiter Bürger of Act III do not.

They are quite different in their expression of a kind of puritan fury at the vices of the rich, and make one feel that Büchner does have some picture of his own of Robespierre's 'tugendhaftes Volk', that he knows at some level that there is a distinction to be made between the 'infernal hordes' who haunted the guillotine and screamed abuse at the prisoners, and the 'tugendhaftes Volk' on whose strength Robespierre hoped to found his republic – the small craftsmen, tradesmen, shopkeepers, who constituted a sizeable force among the Paris *sansculottes*, and were far from being 'der letzte Pöbel'. There is a hint of this class of the population in the citizens who condemn the whoring, exploiting Dantonists, just as Büchner/Weidig condemned the lascivious, parasitic Hessian courtiers.<sup>9</sup> Büchner's political sympathies are surely with them, yet as a playwright he does not mount a full-scale attack on this kind of exploitation, nor does he pursue these fledgling attempts to create a believable 'tugendhaftes Volk': in fact, he sets up a considerable problem for himself, to say nothing of his audience, in putting the emphasis of these good citizens' virtue on outrage at other people's sex habits, those very habits which he proceeds to bathe in an alluring and exciting atmosphere. This puts his audience in something of a moral-emotional dilemma: the licentiousness and luxurious living of the Dantonists is used quite specifically in these two scenes to swing the people, the 'tugendhaftes Volk', against the Dantonists. Our sympathies seem genuinely to be engaged on behalf of the people – they work hard, the sweat of their brow feeds the idle rich, they are forced by hunger to whore and beg. How can we not be on their side? Are we then supposed to be against the enjoying, exploiting Dantonists? If we turn to the only street-scene where Danton actually mingles with the people, it is very hard to believe that this is what Büchner expects from us.

The scene, 'Eine Promenade' (II.2.34-37) is theatrically the most entertaining of the crowd scenes, not least because the plodding humour of Simon and another dim-witted Bürger, with its heavy 'Roman' and 'Revolutionary' overtones is confined to the opening lines. Once beyond that, the scene takes off, and is fast moving, amusing and, as one would say in modern parlance, very sexy. It is difficult even for present-day critics to avoid somewhat coy circumlocutions when describing this scene. Almost any vocabulary normally used in academic literary criticism must inevitably alter Büchner's own intention. Margaret Jacobs, for example, who treats the erotic content of this scene sensibly and seriously,<sup>10</sup> cannot but soften the shock-provoking effect of Büchner's own words when she writes, 'Danton revels with lurid delight in the erotic atmosphere' (p.xxi). Danton after all is actually saying that he would like to tear off his trousers and copulate from behind like a dog in the street (II.2.35). This is blunt language indeed, and if it is blunt enough to embarrass even modern critics, then it was certainly too blunt for Büchner's first editor, Eduard Duller, who omitted it altogether in the first expurgated version of *Dantons Tod* in 1835. Büchner himself responded to Duller's many circumlocutions with exclamation-marks in the margin and comments such as 'Gemein!', and rewrote a great many of his 'obscenities' back into the text.<sup>11</sup> They mattered to

him. For him, Danton's 'revelling in the erotic atmosphere' was an open desire for sex in the street. He is in a wild mood – he cannot see why everyone doesn't stop short and laugh in each other's faces. 'Geht das nicht lustig?' he asks Camille, stepping on to the scene just as two street girls have accosted a couple of soldiers, having since the day before 'nichts Warmes in den Leib gekriegt'. Their hunger – one hears echoes of the Erster Bürger – whores and begs. But we have just met a very amusing beggar sitting in the sun and enjoying it. Two passing gentlemen accuse him of looking well-fed and having hands like velvet. Why doesn't he work, they ask. The beggar quick-wittedly corners them into admitting that they work in order to obtain pleasure: 'Daß ich ein Narr wäre', he says. 'Das hebt einander. Die Sonne scheint warm an das Eck und das geht ganz leicht' (II.2.35).

How is one to react to the scene as a whole? Obviously the modern audience laughs cheerfully with the beggar, sophisticated enough to be amused at this upturning of its own middle-class work ethic. It reacts equally with pleasure to Danton, to the sexual atmosphere which he senses, 'als brüte die Sonne Unzucht aus'. But what of Büchner's own contemporary middle class who would surely disapprove of the beggar and be disgusted at Danton's open sexual excitement? Büchner apologized in advance and at length to his own parents for the 'sogenannte Unsittlichkeit' of the play (II,443). He knew perfectly well that scenes like this would shock and he had every intention of being shocking, notwithstanding the pious theory expressed to his parents that a dramatist was only a writer of history. He is, as a writer, emotionally caught up himself in the sexual excitement of this scene – why else should he write it? The hungry prostitutes are there to remind us briefly of the anger of the Erster Bürger, but the scene as a whole certainly does not quiver with anger against those who buy the flesh of the daughters of the people – it quivers with sex and an amused delight in the foibles of sexual human beings. Who really speaks, then, in *Dantons Tod*, for the whores and the beggars? The Erster Bürger or the Beggar? Well, the Beggar is a very minor character, so let us rephrase the question. Who really speaks for the whores and the beggars? Adelaide and Rosalie? . . . or Marion? It is Marion who forces us to think seriously about this, and to look carefully at that interesting little sub-group of characters, the whores themselves.

## 2. *The Whores*

The emphasis in *Dantons Tod* on whores, on sleeping with the daughters of the people, on sex throbbing through the streets of Paris, this emphasis is largely Büchner's. There is little in his known sources to have given rise explicitly to such imaginings.<sup>12</sup> In all the lengthy accusations levelled against Danton by his enemies before and after his arrest, the closest to such an allusion is made by St Just when, in the middle of a long list of Danton's various crimes, he says of him, 'cupide, débauché, paresseux, corrupteur des moeurs publiques, il est allé s'ensevelir une dernière fois à Arcis-sur-Aube pour jouir de ses rapines'.<sup>13</sup> This latter crime, his

withdrawal from the political scene to his country house to enjoy his ill-gotten gains, was charged against him particularly in the last six months of his life, when he was married to a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl whom he was said to adore, and when he was seeking, in the words of Thiers, 'les jouissances les plus innocentes, celles que procurent les champs, une épouse adorée et des amis' (p.231). Such a source scarcely suggests that he was consorting with prostitutes of any kind at this time, still less with diseased little street girls.

Danton is described in Büchner's sources generally as a lusty, exuberant, athletic character: one can find in an early volume of *Unsere Zeit* a description of him in the early days of the Revolution which contains the following comment: 'Er mochte gern bei lasterhaften Vergnügen von seinen Arbeiten ausruhen, und diese Vergnügungen machten ihn menschlicher. Bei seinen nächtlichen Orgien lachte er über den Schrecken, den er am Morgen verursacht hatte' (Vol.III, p.297). One has to seek out such a comment, however, from the mass of material in this work pertaining to the events of the Revolution, and anyone who is looking for such things will find a similar and more fanciful suggestion about Robespierre himself; in the later days of the Terror, it is claimed, '[er] hatte aus dem Schloß de Maison heimlich eine Insel Capri gemacht, denn es scheint daß er während der letzten Wochen seines fürchterlichen Lebens seine Gewissensbisse und Höllenangst durch Schwelgereien, die seiner bisherigen Lebensweise ganz entgegengesetzt waren, zu betäuben und zu ersäufen suchte' (p.234). Such tales of debauchery in the midst of the Terror occur in the more lurid writings of the time, but Büchner read a great deal more of his sources than their purple passages, and must have known that they were of marginal consequence in those events of the Revolution leading to the death of Danton.

Certainly the whores who loom so large as characters and in the dialogue of *Dantons Tod*<sup>14</sup> scarcely, on my reading, figure in the accepted sources at all. There is one reference to 'Danton's whores', or rather one reference which might appear to be such, but is probably no such thing: Büchner's Danton says in gaol, 'Ich lasse Alles in einer schrecklichen Verwirrung. Keiner versteht das Regieren. Es könnte vielleicht noch gehn, wenn ich Robespierre meine Huren und Couthon meine Waden hinterließe' (IV.5.69). The reference to 'meine Huren' sounds natural enough by this time in the play, and is typical of the casual proprietary way Danton refers to these adjuncts of the Dantonist group, as, for example, in his comment, 'Unsere Huren könnten es noch mit den Guillotinenbetschwestern aufnehmen' (II.1.32). The expression is linked in Thieberger's sources (p.35) to a passage in *Unsere Zeit*, the impression being therefore that the historical Danton also talked casually of his whores: he is supposed to have said in gaol, "Könnte ich Robespierre meine H...n und Couthon meine Waden hinterlassen, so würde sich der Wohlfahrtsausschuß noch eine Zeitlang halten' (p.124). The word 'H . . . n' is discreetly left out by the compiler of *Unsere Zeit*, who was in all probability leaving out a quite different word, namely 'Hoden', altogether more fitting in



the context.<sup>15</sup> Whether Büchner deliberately substituted the word 'Huren' or whether he was so obsessed by his own visions of Danton's whores that he read in the word automatically, is of no consequence. The point is that he focussed attention on 'Danton's whores' to a degree quite disproportionate to any part which such characters might have played in the events or even the background atmosphere of Danton's fall from power.

It is absurd to dismiss them, however, for that reason, as being somehow irrelevant to the events and atmosphere of *Dantons Tod*. One has rather to look at what Büchner is doing with the events of the Revolution and its atmosphere, when he makes them appear significant in it, because he does just that. 'Die Schenkel der Demoiselle guillotiniere dich', says Lacroix to Danton who prefers to make love to the prostitute Marion than heed Lacroix's call to self-defensive political action, 'der mons Veneris wird dein tarpejischer Fels' – this at the end of a scene (I.5.26) in which the atmosphere has been drenched in sexual talk, all the way from Marion's own undulating sexual confessions, through the dirty talk of the Dantonists with the street girls to the political conversation in which the opposition of the people has been characterized in purely sexual terms by Danton himself: 'Es [das Volk] haßt die Genießenden, wie ein Eunuch die Männer' (I.5.25). When Knight therefore writes of the 'long speech by Marion on the subject of her experiences and passions', and comments, 'The analysis of these is of some interest as an experimental psychological statement, but contributes nothing to the theme of the play' (p.74), one has to wonder whether he is not over-simplifying or even misconstruing what the theme of the play actually is.

Marion has always been a bit of a puzzle to literary critics, and those who have paid much attention to her have often felt constrained in some way or another to apologize for her. Viëtor early tried to give her literary respectability by suggesting that Büchner was expanding upon a Romantic literary motif, 'die positive Darstellung der Dirne', and had merely made her more simple and natural: 'Büchner rückt die Gestalt der unschuldigen Dirne aus romantischem Helldunkel in das klare Licht der neuen Naturheiligung.' Danton, he thinks, is also being shown in this scene in a positive light, in his strong, glowing love of life (Viëtor (1949), pp.122f.). It is quite a long way from this rather healthy open-air version of Marion to Abutille's more modern, but still innocent 'Weibtier': he sees her as 'ein fast unschuldiges Kind' but in the sense of a very young nymphomaniac prostitute who has not yet recognized the real horrors of her trade: she is therefore, for him, a realistic figure, who manages to be innocent as well as 'verdorben und vertiert' (pp.56 f.). Martens argues even more mysteriously that Marion's being is 'zutiefst tragisch': there is a 'dunkle kreatürliche Traurigkeit' in her words: she is trapped 'in einer dumpfen Sinnlichkeit', a human being who is driven by 'etwas Elementares, Fremdes, Unkontrollierbares in ihrem eignen heißen Blut'.<sup>16</sup> Benn has recently tried to rescue her from the tragic fate to which Martens assigned her, arguing that it can hardly be tragic, if she does not feel it to be so. He sees her sensuality as an elemental force. 'But she

has no soul.' He tries hard to save her reputation nevertheless: 'Marion is obviously a very dangerous person, but notwithstanding her complete and fatal amorality, one retains some respect for her. She is no vulgar prostitute. (Benn (1976), pp.136 f.). One begins to see Büchner's own half-amused, half-angry exclamation-marks, in particular his 'Ei! Ei!', in the margin as so many critics make such noble efforts to rescue Marion from being what he surely intended her to be: a naturally highly-sexed person who indulges her sex-urge to the exclusion of all else and to the horror of her mother and her first lover. The mysterious 'etwas Elementares, Fremdes, Unkontrollierbares in ihrem eignen heißen [!] Blut' is the sex instinct, which is elemental and sometimes uncontrollable – but strange? Not only is it not strange in itself, but its uncontrollability is not strange either. It is a commonplace of experience that men and women live through periods of time, often but not always in youth, when they are totally obsessed by sex and thoughts of sex. Marion captures very well this sometimes exciting, sometimes debilitating sensation. People who allow such a sensation to dominate their whole lives are nymphomaniacs, but not particularly sinister or mysterious for that. It is a rather wild effort of imagination on Büchner's part to see such a person in a prostitute – Marion's speech is less than convincing as the speech of a working prostitute, but it is absolutely convincing as a young man's fantasy of the totally sensuous woman. 'I want', says Danton, 'to break on every wave of your beautiful body.' Precisely. And so in that moment, no doubt, does the young Georg Büchner. There is nothing mysterious in this either.

To suggest, as I am here suggesting, that obviously Büchner's own sex urges play a part in his emphasis on sex in *Dantons Tod* is not by any means to suggest that such emphasis is for this reason irrelevant to the theme of the play. Marion is an unlikely prostitute and a pure fantasy of the author's, not only because she loves sex, but because she has worked out a good intellectual rationalization of her way of life: 'Meine Natur war einmal so, wer kann da drüber hinaus? . . . Es läuft auf eins hinaus, an was man seine Freude hat, an Leibern, Christusbildern, Blumen oder Kinderspielsachen, es ist das nemliche Gefühl, wer am Meisten genießt, betet am Meisten' (I.5.22). One can hardly regard this as irrelevant to the theme of the play when it is so often repeated in various forms throughout, not least as the core of the Dantonists' own expressed hedonistic philosophy. Büchner must be very interested in the idea – why else should he keep repeating it?

He also repeats at intervals, of course, the quite separate notion that prostitutes are forced into prostitution by economic factors. There is a sense in which these two notions contradict or at least undermine each other: 'Es läuft auf eins hinaus, an was man seine Freude hat' – this statement makes little sense in the hungry world of Adelaide and Rosalie, where their basic survival needs are not supplied, and they can hardly get to the point of choosing how to take their pleasure. Büchner is interested and disturbed by their world too, but he tends to separate it from Marion's in the play, and does not face up explicitly to the contradictions involved. After the long speech of Marion, Lacroix enters with Rosalie and

Adelaide, and the whole tone of the scene changes. From the worship of the flesh enacted between Danton and Marion, the dialogue descends to dirty talk. The silence of Danton, 'whose lips have eyes', becomes his dig-in-the-ribs banter with Rosalie: 'Ey, Kleine, du hast ja geschmeidige Hüften bekommen ...'. There are many ugly jokes about venereal disease which are a world away from the beauty of Marion, an indication of her 'unreality', since realistically, she must have been more exposed to the disease than most. The other two prostitutes are dispatched with a merry, 'Gute Nacht, ihr Quecksilbergruben', on the part of Lacroix. 'Sie dauern mich', says Danton charitably, 'Sie kommen um ihr Nachtessen' (I.5.23 f.).

Are Rosalie and Adelaide then giving, from Büchner's point of view, the real message of the whores and the beggars? If so, why Marion? Why, in particular, her Dantonist rationalization of the behaviour of those who follow their natural urges no matter what the consequences to those around them? Obviously Büchner knows that these urges are powerful and important motivating factors in human behaviour: he is apparently as interested in exploring them as he is in exploring the economic factors which cruelly deprive whole segments of the population of the chance to choose how to enjoy themselves. If he were not, he would hardly create a character like Marion alongside two characters like Rosalie and Adelaide.

Büchner knows and cares about natural urges not only because he is young, but because he is a student of medicine, of anatomy and physiology, and furthermore the son of a doctor who himself, as one can tell from his writings, had an overriding intellectual curiosity about the human body. I do not mean this statement in the way well-meaning critics have sometimes intended similar statements, as an excuse for Büchner's stress on sex and obscenity. Viëtor wrote apologetically, for example: 'Daß er aus den Zoten nicht herauskommt, verrät eine Lebensstufe, auf der das Geschlechtliche wichtiger scheint als die andern Lebensbereiche. Man hat sich auch zu erinnern, daß er Medizin-Student war . . . [man hat] kein Recht, von diesen Zynismen auf die Persönlichkeit des Autors zu schließen. Von Lüsterheit ist ohnehin nicht die Rede' (Viëtor (1949), pp. 117 f.). No particular purpose is served by enhancing or defending the long-dead Georg Büchner's reputation as a lecher. It is however important to stress that the phenomenon of natural, physical urges was real and interesting to him, exciting no doubt on the level of personal experience, but also straightforwardly discussable on a rational text-book level. It is worth recalling, since it is perhaps little known in literary circles, that there were well-known physiologists in Büchner's time and the decades preceding it, who wrote quite matter-of-factly about sex, even, be it said, about such 'modern' topics as female orgasm and pre-menstrual tension.<sup>17</sup> So did many less-known practitioners of medicine: Georg's father, Ernst Büchner, conducted solid research of his own into case histories among his patients, and published detailed, factual articles on such topics as venereal disease, self-castration and masturbation, these when Georg was twelve and thirteen years old.<sup>18</sup> Such men were certainly a good deal more

matter-of-fact in tone than most literary critics, writing and squirming about poor Marion.

Büchner was not after all himself brought up on academic literary criticism. When he wrote *Dantons Tod*, he was not only living in a house full of medical journals,<sup>19</sup> but he had already spent two years in Strasbourg as a student of medicine and the natural sciences at a time when, for example, knowledge must already have been widespread in medical circles of the works of the French doctor, P.J.G. Cabanis, his *Coup d'oeil* of 1804, his *Rapports du physique et moral de l'homme*,<sup>20</sup> and of the circle of French intellectuals with whom he associated, called the *Idéologues*.<sup>21</sup> These men traced their ideas, as does Cabanis specifically in the Preface to his *Rapports*, to Locke and his 'axiome fondamentale' that all ideas come from the senses or are the product of the sensations. Cabanis develops this fundamental axiom to the point where he can assert blandly that the brain digests impressions and organically secretes thought, that the action of the brain, in other words, must be regarded in a similar way to the action of the stomach which digests food and secretes bile through the liver (pp.X f.). This kind of astoundingly calm suggestion that so-called intellectual phenomena are the result of organic action might still alienate and disturb idealistic literary scholars, but Büchner in the 1830s must have been completely used to such speculation.

Whether or not he read Cabanis, he was almost certainly familiar with the well-known physiology text-book of 1816, *Précis élémentaire de physiologie*, by the great experimental physiologist of the early nineteenth century, François Magendie; here, among the detailed accounts of the functioning of physical organs based on his own experiments, he includes, in the tradition of Cabanis, sections on, for example, intelligence – it being essential, he says, to regard phenomena which belong to the intelligence of man as a result of the action of the brain, an organ governed by the same general laws as other organs (Vol.I, p. 170); on the instincts and passions – those 'Triebe', in other words, which seem to motivate Marion, and which in Magendie's view result from the action of the nervous system (Vol.I, p.185); and on desire and the will, the will being for Magendie 'that modification of the sensing faculty through which we experience our desires'. In this context he writes:

Lorsque nous satisfaisons nos désirs, nous sommes *heureux*; nous sommes *malheureux*, au contraire, si nos désirs ne sont point accomplis; il importe donc de donner à nos désirs une direction telle que nous arrivions au bonheur . . . La *morale* est une science dont l'objet est de donner la meilleure direction possible à nos désirs. (Vol. I, p. 177)

It is perhaps not unimportant to read these men, and to absorb their manner of looking at the human being: one realizes then that when Büchner gives Marion, for example, her statement of the pleasure principle as the primary force which motivates people – 'Es läuft auf eins hinaus, an was man seine Freude hat' – he does so not simply against a background of philosophical, ethical thinking, but also

of physiological, medical thinking. Better stated, there could not have been for him, with his background and training, the same kind of crucial distinction between these two modes of thought as there is for many of us today. Cabanis, in fact, called his branch of 'medicine', 'physiologie philosophique'.

This is not to suggest in any sense that Büchner in *Dantons Tod* is preaching the gospel of Cabanis and Magendie. One historian of science who has in a stimulating short article drawn serious attention to the possible influence of these men on Büchner's work, W. L. von Brunn, is careful to insist that Büchner's characters are not simply applied clichés out of Magendie's textbook, but perhaps even he slightly overstates the extent to which this particular work served as 'Vorlage Büchnerscher Charakterzeichnung' (Brunn, p.1360). For our purposes, suffice it to say at this point that the main ideas of Cabanis and the *Idéologues*, reflected with his own emphases by Magendie,<sup>22</sup> were undoubtedly part and parcel of the intellectual currency in which Büchner and his fellow-students were dealing in the 1830s. It is of some interest in this context to note, for example, that Cabanis's well-known characterization of thought as an 'excretion' of the brain is the leading idea of Ludwig Büchner's chapter on 'Thought' in his popular work, *Kraft und Stoff* (1855), the virtual bible of nineteenth-century German materialists.<sup>23</sup> In this chapter, he refers to what he calls 'die bekannte und vielgeschmähte Äußerung Carl Vogts': 'Die Gedanken stehen in demselben Verhältniß zu dem Gehirn, wie die Galle zur Leber oder der Urin zu den Nieren', pointing out in later editions that this idea was expressed in similar form, long before Vogt, by the French doctor and philosopher, Cabanis.<sup>24</sup> Vogt, it will be remembered, was a fellow-student of Georg Büchner's in Wernkekinck's *Privatissimum* on Comparative Anatomy in Gießen, 1833-34. Vogt and Ludwig Büchner lived, of course, a great deal longer than Georg, and Ludwig is in fact already in 1855 a good deal more cautious in his formulation of Cabanis's propositions than Cabanis himself was,<sup>25</sup> but they all three came under roughly the same formative influences as students.<sup>26</sup> Georg Büchner is not propounding ideas on man in *Dantons Tod* in the confident way that Ludwig did at the age of thirty-one, in *Kraft und Stoff*. When von Brunn writes therefore, 'Danton wie Marion, der Hauptmann wie Woyzeck, sie sind alle Registrierapparate der Verhältnisse, in denen sie leben, sie sind Nervenapparate – so lehrt die Physiologie' (p.1359), he is legitimately suggesting the manner in which Magendie, for example, might have viewed Danton, Marie, the Hauptmann and Woyzeck,<sup>27</sup> but to impute such uniformity of vision to Büchner would be to overstate the case.

Georg Büchner in the 1830s clearly had access to the current 'knowledge' that the physical organization of man strongly influenced what he did. It is my opinion that, young as he was, this knowledge must have presented him with more questions than it did answers. He undoubtedly realized, for example, that if one's physical organization was so influential, then concepts of 'will' and 'choice' became highly problematic. A fellow anatomist, Antoine Desmoulins, in the opening sentence of a book which Büchner definitely read at some point in his short scient-

ific career, states more or less in passing as a self-evident fact, that the intelligence, the will, and the conscience reside in the nervous system.<sup>28</sup> What does such a view make of man, for example, as a social being, supposedly responsible for his actions? Büchner certainly faced and wrestled with this question. 'Meine Natur ist einmal so, wer kann da drüber hinaus?' says Marion. But this apparently simple answer must have left Büchner with a number of new question-marks, if we are to judge by the whole complex of characters in *Dantons Tod* alone.

Marion is a simple one-dimensional character, dominated by her body and her sexual urges. She is not 'real' in the sense of acting and reacting in a recognizable context: she exists in her own detached world and delivers an unchallenged monologue. Adelaide and Rosalie are also simple characters and can also be said, certainly in terms of Magendie's theory of the instincts,<sup>29</sup> to be obeying the animal instinct for survival. Their hunger itself, however, a primitive enough urge, is depicted at least rudimentarily in a social setting, as someone's apparent responsibility, a social and economic injustice. And then there is yet another small category of one-dimensional characters whose motivation seems to belong to another separate world – namely the wives in the play, Julie and Lucille. These are as much Büchner's own invention as the *sansculottes* and the whores, and placed alongside the latter certainly challenge the notion that Büchner had reached any final certainty on the motivation of human beings.

### 3. *The Wives*

Few critics venture to talk of the two wives and Marion in the same breath: Henry J. Schmidt, perhaps in the spirit of modern enlightenment, writes of 'the radiant soothing world of Julie, Lucile and Marion, symbolizing the bond of love between individuals which is the only effective defence against the mechanistic forces of the Revolution' (Schmidt (1970), p.61). Radiant and soothing are perhaps strange words to apply to Marion's world, but they very much apply to the world of Julie and Lucille as it is generally seen. The two wives occupy a peculiar place in Büchner-criticism in that they are almost always described in glowing and approving terms, quite as if they are real women to be awarded places of honour in some imagined hierarchy of saintly females. 'Against the dark background of all this misery and turpitude', writes Benn, 'the two pure figures of Julie and Lucille appear in an almost radiant light' (Benn (1976), p.138). They are usually perceived as a complete contrast to Marion: 'Die zwei herrlichen Frauengestalten bilden den positiven Pol gegenüber dem Weibtier Marion', writes Abutille (p.59), but hazards no opinion on the possible significance of this, commenting only that they are, all three, figures of life and reality, and for that reason Büchner is not judging their characters by standards of conventional morality. Benn, recognizing them to be 'unhistorical' and fearing therefore that one might regard them as unrealistic or 'idealized', assures us that this is not so, but that Büchner has 'earned the right to express' a positive aspect of human nature by the radical honesty of his expression of the negative

aspect (Benn (1976), p.140). Viëtor, also committed to Büchner as a realist who is faithful to his sources, explains the two 'unhistorical' women as a kind of tribute to Minna Jaeglé, 'ein Dank des Dichters für das einzige reine Glück in seinem unstäten, problematischen Dasein' (Viëtor (1949), p. 149). Ludwig Büttner goes so far as to suggest that 'die Frauenbildnisse zeigen Büchners Einfühlung in die weibliche Seele' (p.75). Such hyperbole finds its opposite pole in the more politically oriented critics, such as Lukács and Mayer, who do not pay much attention to the women at all.

It is worth looking at them, provided one can cut a way through all the radiant light and sounds of music.<sup>30</sup> Büchner invented these women himself, and it is interesting that he did so. They are the only historical characters in the play in whose case he does not simply manipulate but blatantly ignores historical events, and creates his own version of what might have been. In the case of Danton's wife, he does not even use her real name, Louise, but gives her the name of Julie. One should perhaps not make too much of this since it is possible that he knew little of her beyond Thiers's mention of an 'épouse adorée'.<sup>31</sup> He would not, however, have had to look far to find out her real name. In any case, the Julie whom he creates is a long way from the sixteen-year-old girl who married again a few years after Danton's death, and outlived, as Bergemann has pointed out with a nice irony, Büchner himself.<sup>32</sup>

What kind of a character is his Julie? In fact she says very little in the play which might give an inkling of who or what she really is. She says to Danton in the first scene of the play, 'You know me Danton'. 'Yes', he replies, 'what one calls knowing. You have dark eyes and curly hair and a fine complexion and you say, Dear Georg, to me all the time. But what is in there behind your eyes?' A travesty, indeed, of a relationship. The critics who see Julie as 'das einzige reine Glück' in Danton's life, as Minna was in the life of her 'dear Georg', never read this speech as reflecting on the relationship of Danton and Julie (and certainly not on the relationship of Georg and Minna), but as a general statement on man's inability to know and communicate with his fellow-men. 'We have coarse senses. Know each other? We would have to break open each other's skulls and tear the thoughts out of each other's brain tissue.' Here is perhaps a mocking echo of Cabanis's brain excreting its thought — mocking indeed, since Büchner by this time must have dissected enough brains to know precisely what one could expect to learn from dying brain tissue. It is a remark of despair concerning personal knowledge of another human being, and it is addressed to Julie, not to his friends and political allies. He and they express to one another their thoughts and ideas and generally speaking 'what goes on in their heads' all through the play; they engage in genuine debate and various kinds of banter, and they also show genuine feeling for each other. In comparison with this, Danton is indeed alone when he is with Julie. She remains an enigma. She says nothing. For the rest of the first scene, she says only

'Oh!' and 'Du gehst', sitting silently through the long interesting conversation between Danton, Hérault, and the rest.

She does not appear again until the night scene where Danton awakes from nightmares of his crimes and massacres. She tries to calm him, tells him he is dreaming, calls him 'Georg, mein Georg', feeds him where necessary the lines he wants to hear – 'the kings were forty hours from Paris, the Republic was lost, yes, yes, you saved the Fatherland . . .'. He bursts into his agonized cry on the inevitability of 'Aergernis', persuades himself that men are puppets manipulated by unknown powers, and claims a sense of peace. 'Ganz ruhig, lieb Herz?' she asks, making no comment on one of the key speeches of the play. 'Ja, ja, Julie, komm zu Bett.' Those who say that Danton finds peace with Julie in this scene do not usually add that she plays essentially no part in it but that of a sounding board, and when she asks him if he recognizes her, he replies with the scepticism of the first scene, 'Why not? You're a human being, and then a woman, and then my wife, and the earth has five continents . . . and two and two make four' (II.5.40 f.). As a character in her own right, even in his eyes, she seems scarcely to exist.

She has now only her part to play to the end: she sends a boy to him in prison with a lock of her hair: she will die with him. 'Come back', she says to the boy, 'I want to read his gaze in your eyes.' These are words which, in the context, cannot but move. Danton later acknowledges her sacrifice briefly, 'Ich werde nicht allein gehn, ich danke dir Julie' (IV.3.67). His calm acceptance with its implication that she will somehow accompany him is, one might think, an odd attitude for a self-expressed atheist, a piece of highly romantic selfishness, yet it cannot seem at all surprising to any audience that Julie should wish to die with him. She has no life in the play without him. Just before his execution is her death scene – again highly romantic and undeniably touching; she swallows poison and speaks poetically of the earth in the setting sun, calm and solemn as a dying woman – 'Schlafe, schlafe.' – and she dies (IV.6.72 f.).

Of course this is not a realistic death. Anyone who is tempted to give a blanket description of realism to the play, particularly one accompanied by references to Büchner's showing all the realism of a scientist, should remember this scene, and contrast it with the medical reality of death by poison, or, indeed, with a literary death by poison as portrayed by a real realist or naturalist. Julie's poisoning is no more real than Hollywood's version of leukaemia: more to the point, she dies with a phial of poison straight out of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is however absolutely plausible, and in keeping with her character, what there is of it, in the play. Why does she commit suicide? An absurd question which would enter no one's head. Büchner does not have to produce for her an intellectual rationalization of what she does, as he does for Marion. Julie is motivated by love for Danton. She is submerged in it. She is an emotion, a feeling in a pretty body with a pretty face, someone who says 'Lieb Georg' and very little else. Neither we, nor Danton, nor presumably Büchner have the faintest idea of what goes on in her head. Take away all the radiant light,



and it is very hard to see the stalwart paragon of womankind which the critics have created.

Lucile is less insipid, and much more delicately drawn. She is, of course, not very bright. One can hardly blame the blunt Anna Jaspers who wrote in her dissertation of 1921, 'Lucile ist eine weiche, unselbständige Natur, die nichts kennt, als ihre Liebe zu Camille. Wenn es Camille gilt, wird sie hellhörig und klug. Sonst ist sie töricht' (p.46).<sup>33</sup> Salutory antidote as this is to much other sentimental verbiage, it does leave certain things to be said. Büchner's standard sources gave him more to go on in the case of Lucile than that of Julie, but while he uses some of the details, he ignores the larger course of events. The real Lucile did haunt the prison environs with her children while Camille was a prisoner, but she did not choose to die: Camille, if one is to judge by his very moving letters from prison,<sup>34</sup> would have been devastated at the thought of her death. She was arrested on charges of sedition some weeks after Camille's execution, and was guillotined, ironically, at the same time as the widow of Hébert, one of Camille's great enemies. Her youth and beauty, combined with her strength and courage in the face of death, caused a stir even among the hardened spectators of bloodshed in the Paris of 1794.<sup>35</sup> Büchner chooses to ignore the implications of strength and character and fortitude in the sources and to embroider rather on her loveliness by making her mad in a sweet, naive Ophelia-like way. She is a touching character who moves the audience – the modern audience – more surely than does Julie. She has, and this is no doubt what Anna Jaspers means, absolutely no intellectual substance. She too sits silently through an interesting conversation between Danton and Camille, and her distance from it is pinpointed precisely, and as it seems on the modern stage comically, by Büchner during a lull in the conversation when Danton is called away:

*Camille.* Was sagst du, Lucile?  
*Lucile.* Nichts, ich seh dich so gern sprechen.  
*Camille.* Hörst mich auch?  
*Lucile.* Ey freilich.  
*Camille.* Hab ich recht, weißt du auch, was ich gesagt habe?  
*Lucile.* Nein, wahrhaftig nicht. (II.3.37 f.)

Danton returns and the practical discussion of their political fate goes on.<sup>36</sup> Lucile does not think, she senses. She senses and is terrified of Camille's approaching death. The notion of separation comes into her head, as if of its own accord; her apprehension of impending horror is expressed in snatches of subconsciously related song. Büchner is very good at this; in these slight sketches of Lucile he captures the expression of a mind that is working at a subconscious level with little grasp of surface events. Lucile here is real and convincing, and it is no surprise when she appears later outside the prison, mad with grief, but sweet, gentle, singing, chasing after the word 'sterben' which escapes her. In her last appearance after the execution, her inability to grasp the contrast between the world which goes on around her and the death, the disappearance of Camille, is beautifully depicted.

'Mein Camille, wo soll ich dich jetzt suchen?', she says, and there are tears in the eyes of the audience.

Lucile, with her final cry of 'Vive le roi!' chooses to die as did Julie. Büchner presents their choice as a more or less self-evident, even inevitable, occurrence. They die, as they lived, for love. Their self-chosen deaths are depicted totally without cynicism, as acts of beauty, of poignancy, something to shed unsophisticated tears over. Audiences are to accept at face value – and often do with emotion – what Büchner seems here to present; pure self-willed self-sacrifice for love. 'Es läuft auf eins hinaus, an was man seine Freude hat', said Marion. Oh? But the pleasure motive makes nonsense of Julie and Lucile, no less than Adelaide and Rosalie in their way made nonsense of the pleasure motive. Büchner's fragmented and episodic style makes it possible for these three kinds of characters to remain in separate and unencroaching worlds, and never to have to meet each other's challenge in actual dialogue. There are times, however, in modern theatrical productions where they do encroach and begin to make nonsense of each other. I suggested earlier, for example, that Julie's suicide is, in its way, undeniably touching. Equally undeniably it is hard to take it quite seriously in *Dantons Tod* as played in the modern theatre. Romantic, peaceful, near-operatic deaths accompanied by poetry do not go down very well in productions where the cynicism of the men is being emphasized, and the sex scenes played for every bit of modern titillation possible. In the most recent production which I have seen, Julie, for example, was present throughout the scene of Danton and Marion, which took place in Danton's bed, with Julie participating in all the touching and caressing which took place.<sup>37</sup> This seems to me a strange apprehension of the role of Julie, yet the modern producer cannot really be blamed for creating his own kind of order out of what is in fact a quite real confusion of atmosphere and character in the play itself. When Danton, for example, goes from the bed of Marion to that of Julie – and the one-set staging, unmade beds and scant clothing of the modern stage tend to force one's attention to this fact – then the contrast between Danton's lusty unthinking infidelity and Julie's undying devotion seems unbearably crass. One can also hardly avoid realizing that if Danton is sleeping with diseased prostitutes then he and the radiant Julie must be diseased too.<sup>38</sup> Such a down-to-earth connexion would no doubt itself be thought crass and irrelevant even by critics who firmly underline the 'realism' of the play, but the fact surely is that while Julie, Marion, and Rosalie and Adelaide have a certain plausibility as characters in their separate worlds, Büchner has not depicted them together in a plausible context which might absorb and make sense out of them all in relation to one another.

This is no doubt partly a consequence of his immaturity as a dramatist. It would be a psychological cliché to suggest that his immaturity as a man plays a part in his separation of 'love' and 'sex' into wives and prostitutes, and this is no place to launch into a full-scale psychological study of Büchner the man. Nevertheless a few simple caveats might be in order, since there are many critics who would probably

deny that they are practising psychological criticism but who lay claim very casually to insights into Büchner's relationships with women, particularly with Minna Jaeglé, 'sein einziges, reines Glück', often suggesting that she was the model for Julie and Lucile, as well as for Lena in *Leonce und Lena*.<sup>39</sup> At least the casualness of these assumptions ought to be questioned.

J.P. Stern is one of the few critics to look with a sceptical eye at what he calls Büchner's 'somewhat unreal love affair' with Minna Jaeglé, and to draw attention by contrast to his 'capacity for intense friendships' (Stern (1964), p.82). He also pays some serious attention to a psychological study by John S. White, 'Georg Büchner: or The Suffering through the Father', published in 1952, but, as Stern says, almost completely ignored in subsequent criticism. It is, as the title implies, somewhat heavy-handedly Freudian, but it does challenge interestingly and legitimately a number of the obvious clichés of Büchner biography, not least the very pervasive one that Minna was, purely and simply, the light of his short dark life.<sup>40</sup> Without going into White's argument which delves into Büchner's 'parental scene', one can at least take note of a completely obvious problem in their relationship, namely that Minna was a sweet and simple girl – this at any rate is the way Georg seems to have seen her – whom he undoubtedly loved, but with whom he had very little in common. Almost all the critics who discuss their relationship refer to his last letter to her, written when he was ill, in which he says, 'Ich muß mich bald wieder an Deiner inneren Glückseligkeit stärken und Deiner göttlichen Unbefangtheit und Deinem lieben Leichtsinn und all Deinen bösen Eigenschaften, böses Mädchen' (II,464), and pick up from it and similar passages, quite legitimately, the terminology of their own adulation of Minna and of Büchner's fictional women – 'glücklich', 'göttlich unbefangen', 'lieber Leichtsinn', etc. Clearly, it is a sincere expression of the kind of need which Büchner felt for his 'naughty girl', who was, be it said, three years older than he, and therefore twenty-six years old at the time. We have no record of her letters to him, but one remark gives us a clue about them: this is in an earlier letter written when he was suffering badly from the intellectual and emotional isolation which he felt in Gießen: 'Lieb Kind, was macht denn die gute Stadt Straßburg? Es geht dort allerlei vor, und du sagst kein Wort davon' (II,425). One can well imagine that Minna, the devout pastor's daughter who later destroyed, or at least withheld his unpublished work from the public, on the basis of atheistic statements in it,<sup>41</sup> did not share or understand many of his main interests, that the 'lieb Kind' might not in the long run have satisfied him. This is of course pure conjecture, and while it is no more so than the automatic assumption that they would have lived happily ever after, it has little bearing on the plays themselves.

What is important, however, if one is to avoid talking blithely about 'herrliche Frauengestalten' and 'Einfühlung in die weibliche Seele', is to realise that for intelligent, university-educated young men of Büchner's day, women were almost certainly a problem. There was the obvious difficulty of the availability of sex for young men who could not afford to get married, and society was dogged

furthermore by stereotypes of the innocent and naive child-woman on the one hand, who was desirable as a wife, and the clever blue-stocking on the other, who was not. This latter problem is discussed with great intelligence by Büchner's sister, Luise, who published extensively in the mid-nineteenth century: her acerbic analyses of the educational system, of society's expectations, of the hollowness of many middle-class marriages deserve to be read.<sup>42</sup> Her unfinished novelle, *Ein Dichter*, based on the school-days of her brother Georg, and ignored by most critics, throws many sidelights on the problems of young men growing up in the single-sex gymnasia of middle-class Germany, encountering the female sex mainly in the 'eitle verliebte Dinge' of the dancing classes, girls who received little or no serious formal education themselves.<sup>43</sup> There is much interesting material here for a new biographical study of Büchner himself, but for our purposes, it serves to remind us that for him, the female of the species was probably as much a source as a solver of problems. When he gives to Leonce the lines 'Ich habe das Ideal eines Frauenzimmers in mir und muß es suchen. Sie ist unendlich schön und unendlich geistlos. Die Schönheit ist da so hülflos, so rührend, wie ein neugeborenes Kind. Es ist ein köstlicher Contrast. Diese himmlisch stupiden Augen, dieser göttlich einfältige Mund, dieses schafnasige griechische Profil, dieser geistige Tod in diesem geistigen Leib' (*Leonce und Lena*, II.1.119), he is describing wittily and amusingly the kind of woman whom he has seriously presented in Julie and Lucile, and she is, while obviously to many an appealing fantasy, a very long way from a 'herrliche Frauengestalt', as long a way as from the strong and beautiful Lucile Desmoulins of the sources.

Herbert Lindenberger, in discussing why Büchner diverged so radically from his sources in the case of Julie and Lucile, makes the suggestion that 'both women, as Büchner created them, were necessary to the design of the play, for both, in their various ways, could express a kind of pathos which their much more Stoic-minded husbands could not have voiced so directly' (p.38). I would question whether Büchner's artistic intent was as clearly defined as this, and one could argue that Danton and Camille at times express a pathos oddly at variance with their supposedly Stoic minds; but it is true that in the emotionally conceived characters of Julie and Lucile, Büchner does give full rein to a kind of pathos which his male characters in their separate scenes are at pains to mock. The temptation here is for the critic to regard the mocking and the cynicism as 'realistic' and the pathos as 'idealized'. In fact, if one turns to Büchner's sources on the 'real' French Revolution, one finds large helpings of pathos, and virtually no cynicism. The survivors of the Paris gaols filled pages of their memoirs with heartbreaking stories of heroic daughters who followed fathers into gaol, maids who followed mistresses to the scaffold, spouses, male and female, who chose suicide rather than survival.<sup>44</sup> The tone in which such stories are recounted is well-illustrated by Riouffe in his *Mémoires d'un Detenu*, who writes after a spate of them:

Ici c'est l'époux qui se précipite volontairement dans la tombe d'une épouse chérie; et là c'est l'épouse qui refuse de survivre à son mari. O étincelles de vertu républicaine, vous sillonnez ces longues ténèbres où la France a été plongée pendant plus d'une année entière. Vous élevez l'ame que vous consolez de cet amas de bassesses et de crimes dont l'histoire craindra de salir ces pages! (p.58)

Heroism in times of terrible human agony is real. The prose of survivors describing its inspirational value may sound exaggerated, but one cannot dismiss it as mere rhetoric. The self-chosen deaths of Julie and Lucile in the shadow of the terrible guillotine absolutely legitimately move their audiences, and while critics seem afraid that their selflessness might seem 'idealized',<sup>45</sup> it is infinitely more realistic in terms of, say, Riouffe's view of the French Revolution, than the individualist pleasure-motivated philosophy of Marion and the Dantonists. The 'kind of pathos' which we encounter in Julie's and Lucile's death scenes would be completely comprehensible to a Riouffe. Danton's 'Es gibt nur Epikuräer ... Christus war der feinste' most certainly would not.

Coming to the central characters of the play from the one-dimensionally motivated groups of *sansculottes* and women, one can already see that Büchner has set up great problems of characterization for himself. He is not, after all, creating characters in a void but is trying to portray them as functioning in a well-known and highly emotive historical scene. This has advantages for him, as we have seen: the pathos of Julie's death derives more from the shadow of the guillotine than from anything which Büchner has built into her character. The guillotine, however, casts a strange shadow on Marion. Such complications can only increase, as we turn now from the 'invented' characters to the 'historical' ones.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL CHARACTERS OF *DANTONS TOD*: DANTONISTS AND ROBESPIERRISTS

#### 1. *Dantonist Politics*

An audience which is really thinking about what is going on must, as we have already seen, fall into some confusion as to how to allot its sympathies in *Dantons Tod*: should it, for example, sympathize with the exploited 'tugendhaftes Volk' or with the exploiting 'lasterhaften Dantonisten'? Are the latter really exploiters of the people? Or is this malicious hypocritical propaganda on the part of Robespierre and his allies?

Approaching this problem from the standpoint of the simple one-dimensional characters, one can say: yes, clearly, the Dantonists are the proponents of a pleasure principle, a world for Marion to enjoy, and Robespierre is concerned with the needs of those who are crying for bread. This in itself is easy to see. But one cannot allot sympathies easily on this basis, since those with a political ear for the poor and needy are crying for blood, and those who are taking their pleasure while the people starve are the political voices of mercy and moderation.

Jürgen Petersen has recently suggested, essentially, that the question of who is right and who is wrong is the wrong question, that Büchner has reached the point of transvaluing values; he is deliberately presenting in *Dantons Tod* an irreconcilable contradiction; 'In Robespierre und Danton stehen sich also zwei Antipoden gegenüber, deren politische Moral sich widerspricht, ohne daß sich dieser Widerspruch lösen ließe, ohne daß das Drama dem Zuschauer eine Lösung anböte. Vielmehr scheint es Büchner gerade um den unauflösbaren Widerspruch selbst zu gehen: Der persönlich Tugendhafte handelt politisch gewaltsam, der laszive Epikuräer vertritt die politische Humanität.'<sup>1</sup> This sounds very good and is certainly more sophisticated than the notion that either Danton or Robespierre is in an unambiguously stronger position morally or politically than the other. However it seems to me that such neat balancing of the problem in an even scales, personal virtue here, political humaneness there, is much too clear-cut and intellectual an image for what looks to me more like a boiling and bubbling cauldron of emotions and ideas. If, for example, we look carefully at the 'lascivious Epicureans', do we find that their 'politische Humanität' is really a balancing factor at all?

We have so far looked at the Dantonists only in their 'lascivious Epicurean' role. The scene which shows them in actual conversation with the prostitutes of the

Palais Royal is one in which Danton and Lacroix largely make merry at the expense of the diseased girls. It is an ugly scene, scarcely redeemed, morally or politically, by Danton's genuine sensual appreciation of Marion, or his belated recognition that the girls wanted their dinner. The whole tone of it lends substance to the anger of the Erster Bürger at the idle rich who buy the flesh of the daughters of the people. Is this in some way balanced by what has been called the 'Dantonists' political programme' (Holmes, p.94) in the first scene of the play?

There is an interesting mixture in this scene of quotations and ideas from the historical sources and Büchner's own invented lines. It is tempting therefore for the critic to say that a scene like this, which contributes to the political theme of the play, is 'historical'. In fact it is one of those scenes where a comparison between Büchner and his sources throws into sharp relief the quite 'unhistorical' emphasis which Büchner is putting on the political content. Camille and Philippeau enter the gaming-room (I.1.10) and they and Hérault-Sechelles proceed to make, as it were, policy speeches. The real political core is expressed by Hérault when he says that the Revolution has entered the stage of reorganization. The Revolution must stop and the Republic must begin. He does not explain why he has reached this conclusion, the implication being from Philippeau's preceding speech, that they are all merely tired of bloodshed. Philippeau does mention the necessity for the establishment of a Clemency Committee, which the real Desmoulins in fact advocated in the *Cordelier*.<sup>2</sup> Hérault briefly outlines what he expects from the new Republic: right in place of duty, well-being in place of virtue, self-defence in place of punishment, a society in which everyone counts, everyone can assert his own nature and enjoy himself in his own way without interfering with anyone else. Camille elaborates on this, waxing eloquent in sensuous imagery, comparing the new form of government with an invisible garment clinging to the body of the people and calling for naked gods, Bacchic women, Olympic games, and from melodious lips: 'ach, die gliederlösende, böse Liebe!'. It is perhaps too obvious a comment that while Hérault's speech is almost plausible, Camille's would be laughed out of court by any serious social revolutionary, particularly at a moment of high crisis in the revolution. Nevertheless, it has been represented by a serious critic of the sources of *Dantons Tod*, Adolf Beck, as 'ein dichterisches Konzentrat der Lebensanschauung Camilles, wie er sie darlegt in den frühern Schriften und noch einmal im *Cordelier*' (p.386). Beck is reasonably convinced that Büchner might have read, not only the extracts from Desmoulins's paper, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, included in Thiers's history, but also other writings of his, notably the issues of the *Cordelier* collected in one volume in 1825.<sup>3</sup> Whether in fact he read only the quite lengthy quotations in Thiers, or was positively steeped in Desmoulins's ideas, it seems to me that Büchner's version of the Dantonist political programme in Scene I is a very long way from being a distillate of their political programme as expressed by the journalist Desmoulins.

What Büchner does, to be precise, is to incorporate at the beginning of the scene

a direct quotation from the *Cordelier*, by giving his Hérault a series of questions to the entering Philippeau: Why so sad? ... did it rain during the guillotining or did you get a place where you couldn't see? ... : this allows his Camille to use the words of the real Camille who in his *Cordelier* quoted a series of questions put by Socrates to Alcibiades: Did you lose your shield on the battle-field? ... did someone else sing or play the zither better than you? ... 'Quels républicains aimables!' wrote Desmoulin (quoted by Thiers, p.168). 'Welche klassischen Republikaner!' says Büchner's Camille, adding, 'Nimm einmal unsere Guillotinenromantik dagegen'. Certainly Büchner here is reproducing the comparison which Desmoulin was drawing in his sixth issue of the *Cordelier* – the comparison between the glory that was Greece and the growing terrors of Revolutionary France. I use the word 'terrors'; Büchner is in fact already romanticizing, not to say trivializing, the picture by using the *ex post facto* word 'Guillotinenromantik', not too likely a word for the real Desmoulin in his real and dangerous revolutionary setting.

One should pause for a moment and consider just what the setting was when Desmoulin made his comparison between the Athenian Republic and the Republic of France as he saw it. The Hébertists had not yet been arrested: this violent, anarchistic faction of ultra-revolutionaries was accusing Robespierre and his Committee of being too moderate. They were the bane of Robespierre's existence as well as of the Dantonists', who wanted the blood of the Hébertists as much as Robespierre did. Paris was in uproar, as described by Thiers (see especially pp.149-59), largely because of the notorious *disette*, the general stagnation of commerce, the appalling shortage of food – meat, grain, fruit, eggs, etc. – an uncontrollable black market, and a growing problem from people who went out into the countryside intercepting the food transportations before they reached the city. The government was attempting to keep the situation under control, setting up government-authorized abattoirs, banning the queuing outside food shops before six in the morning – people had begun to gather as early as three, and disorders broke out in the masses of people. Four thousand members of the Revolutionary Army were roaming Paris in uniform and stirring up trouble, encouraged by their generals, the Hébertists Ronsin and Vincent. Against this background, Camille Desmoulin began mounting his attacks on the *status quo*, first and most violently against Hébert and his faction, in issues of the *Cordelier* approved by Robespierre, and then, as Robespierre in response to the situation tightened his policy of 'virtue and terror', against that policy itself. This is not, I should stress, my own version of this course of events, but the version which Büchner himself read in Thiers (see especially pp.161 f.). Thiers explains the moderate position taken by the arch-revolutionaries Danton and Camille at this time in simple terms:

Tous deux pensaient que la république étant sauvée par ses dernières victoires, il était temps de mettre fin à des cruautés désormais inutiles; que ces cruautés prolongées plus longtemps ne seraient propres qu'à compromettre davantage



la révolution et que l'étranger pouvait seul en désirer et en inspirer la continuation. (p. 112)

Their attitude was, in other words, a quite pragmatic one. It was time to produce order out of chaos, and Robespierre's methods in their opinion would not work. It is on this quite pragmatic basis that Desmoulins in the *Cordelier* replies, as Thiers says, 'au système de la vertu par celui du bonheur'. Paraphrasing further from the *Cordelier*, Thiers goes on:

Il disait qu'il aimait la république parce qu'elle devait ajouter à la félicité générale, parce que le commerce, l'industrie, la civilisation s'étaient développés avec plus d'éclat à Athènes, Venise, Florence, que dans toutes les monarchies; parce que la république pouvait seule réaliser le vœu menteur de la monarchie: la poule au pot. (p. 166)

It would, he adds, confound the enemies of France if one could say of it what was said of Athens:

There is nowhere in the world so pleasant to live, whether one has money, or has not: those who are comfortably off through commerce or their industry can procure all the pleasures imaginable, and as for those who would like to be in this position, there are many workshops where they can earn enough to amuse themselves at the 'Antheseria',<sup>4</sup> and still save something; there is no reason for anyone to complain of his poverty without at the same time accusing himself of laziness.

Now one can say that Desmoulins had, certainly, a very bourgeois programme of revolution, but the point is that he did have a recognizable practical aim, and that he wrote with a constant awareness of the poverty and misery around him. He did not believe, as he said, in an equality of privations, and mocked for this reason those revolutionaries who affected the tattered clothes of the poor: the greatest praise the Convention could earn, he said, would be in being able to claim: 'J'ai trouvé la nation sans culottes et je la laisse culottée' (Thiers, p. 167).

This is a long way from Camille's cry for 'nackte Götter, Bachantinnen, olympische Spiele und von melodischen Lippen: ach, die gliederlösende, böse Liebe!', which against the background of hungry Paris sounds flighty, callous, and close to grotesque. There is very little in Thiers's version of Desmoulins, or even in *Le Vieux Cordelier* itself which could induce one to regard Camille's slightly absurd battle-cry as the core of Desmoulins's life-philosophy. He calls, it is true, incessantly in the *Cordelier* for liberty: 'Qu'est-ce qui distingue la république de la monarchie? Une seule chose: la liberté de parler et d'écrire', a respectable middle-class cry for freedom of speech. A good journalist, he insists again and again on what he calls the best defence of free people against dictatorship, asking rhetorically: 'what is it?' and answering: 'C'est la liberté de la presse. Et ensuite, le meilleur? C'est la liberté de la presse. Et après, le meilleur? C'est encore la liberté de la presse.'<sup>5</sup> The liberty to enjoy, in the sense of revel in sensual pleasures, is mentioned by him occasionally and obliquely, as an outgrowth of a well-run commercially successful democratic republic: he points out, for example, in passing, that in the charming democracy

of Athens, Solon was regarded with respect as a legislator and a sage even though he freely admitted his penchant for 'le vin, les femmes et la musique' (Thiers, p.167). Büchner, in throwing all the Dantonists' emphasis on the freedom to enjoy, is robbing them of anything resembling a realistic political programme, that is, of a 'bourgeois revisionist counter-revolutionary' programme, as much as of a 'genuinely' revolutionary one.

T.M. Holmes has tried to show that 'the Dantonists' political programme is revealed [in *Dantons Tod*] as a hegemonic bourgeois ideology, as the project of creating a state power which would in practice uphold the interests and enforce the will of the capitalist class' (p.94). It seems to me that one could probably make a good case for this on the basis of the text of *Le Vieux Cordelier*, but on the basis of the text of *Dantons Tod*, one would have to read in all the political arguments oneself. They are simply not there. Büchner does not give his Dantonists a good political argument for a moderate 'bourgeois' course of action, any more than he puts into their policy anything for the poor, hungry, and deprived. They seem to be motivated by a rather vaguely humanitarian desire to stop the bloodshed (mainly Philippeau), by a normally selfish desire to save their own skins (mainly Lacroix) and a general desire to be left alone and enjoy themselves.

'Warum hast du den Kampf begonnen?' Camille asks Danton, when Danton pours scorn on the 'schöne Dinge' which they are all advocating in Scene 1. He is alluding presumably to the fight of the moderates against Robespierre. 'Die Leute waren mir zuwider', replies Danton, 'Ich konnte dergleichen gespreizte Catonen nie ansehen, ohne ihnen einen Tritt zu geben. Mein Naturell ist einmal so' (I.1.12). Is one to take this seriously? Or is it an idle quip, said, as Hérault later says Danton does everything, 'zum Zeitvertreib'? If it is an idle quip, where in the play do we look for a serious motive behind the Dantonists' political struggle? There are four lines in Danton's last defence before the Revolutionary Tribunal where he touches on the historical reasons for the fight: he accuses Robespierre and his followers of high treason: 'Sie wollen die Republik im Blut ersticken. Die Gleisen der Guillotinenkarren sind die Heerstraßen, auf welchen die Fremden in das Herz des Vaterlandes dringen sollen' (III.9.63), a trace of pragmatic political motivation. But where is some sign of 'political humaneness'? Lacroix is the only Dantonist who makes any down-to-earth utterances on the actual state of affairs in Paris, and who raises the key question of the people's poverty and hunger, not however in any context of compassion, but in the sense that this is bound to strengthen Robespierre's hand against them as moderates: 'Das Volk ist materiell elend, das ist ein furchtbarer Hebel' (I.5.25). For the people, he suggests, weakness and moderation are the same thing. Danton replies with a kind of petulant cynicism, 'Das Volk ist wie ein Kind, es muß Alles zerbrechen, um zu sehen was darin steckt.' Lacroix forces him back to hard facts with his comments on Robespierre's just appeal to the people's virtue: 'Das Volk ist tugendhaft, d.h. es genießt nicht, weil ihm die Arbeit die Genußorgane stumpf macht.' The men of the people do not get drunk, because

they have no money; they do not go to the brothel, because they disgust the girls with their smell of cheese and herring. This is the only moment in the play where the challenge posed by economic deprivation to the pleasure principle is actually voiced in the dialogue, but Danton does not answer it; he merely responds with his own more vicious version of what Lacroix has said: 'Es [das Volk] haßt die Genießenden, wie ein Eunuch die Männer.'

In all of the rest of the play, Danton alludes to the general misery of the people of France only once, and that in what must be one of the most cynical remarks ever attributed to a 'political humanitarian': In Act II, Scene 1, when he has talked at length about his own boredom with life, and the pointlessness of making any effort to save himself, Philippeau finally asks: 'Und Frankreich bleibt bei seinen Henkern?' Danton's answer is: 'Die Leute befinden sich ganz wohl dabey. Sie haben Unglück, kann man mehr verlangen um gerührt, edel, tugendhaft oder witzig zu seyn oder um überhaupt keine Langeweile zu haben? – Ob sie nun an der Guillotine oder am Fieber oder am Alter sterben? ...' (II.1.33). This is a witty enough comment in a drawing-room, but in a city where people are without bread, and the 'innocent' are dying daily with the 'guilty' in the gaols and on the guillotine, it is at best a cruel joke. None of the other Dantonists comment on it; it is not argued out, and it is the last comment invented by Büchner for any of them which has any real bearing on what is happening to the people of France. One of Robespierre's men, speaking later, fearing that the people may continue to be impressed by the power of Danton and his friends, says, with an implied scorn for the people that equals anything said by the Dantonists: 'Das Volk hat einen Instinct sich treten zu lassen und wäre es nur mit Blicken, dergleichen insolente Physiognomien gefallen ihm. Solche Stirnen sind ärger als ein adliges Wappen, die feine Aristocratie der Menschenverachtung sitzt auf ihnen' (III.6.56). I can find very little in the text of Büchner's play that really belies this comment on the Dantonists as a group. It is, regardless of one's political or social loyalties, an ugly aspect of their character. One is tempted, on the face of it, to suggest that characters who are drawn in a time of great human misery as not only 'laszive Epikuräer' but politically callous and cynical to boot must in some sense be the villains of the piece. One is tempted but that is as far as it goes. Interestingly, there are powerful emotional pressures which make it equally tempting to regard these same men as heroes. These pressures, rather than any intellectual, political counterweight, upset the scales on which one might try to measure the relative merits of the Dantonists and Robespierrists.

Much critical effort has been expended on trying to prove that Büchner was putting his own weight on one side or the other, but no analysis that stresses ideological and political standpoints to the exclusion of emotional impact is going to get very close to the heart of the matter. Heroes and villains appeal to the emotions, and it is harder to transvalue values emotionally than intellectually, as a look at the Dantonists alongside the lesser Robespierrists should begin to illustrate.

## 2. *Heroes or Villains*

The fine aristocracy of 'Menschenverachtung' sits quite easily and unpleasingly on the Dantonists, if 'Menschenverachtung' is taken to mean contempt for the masses. That they show considerable affection and respect for each other is equally undeniable, ignored though this must be, if one wishes to explain the play as an exercise in existential loneliness, and the 'Wir wissen wenig von einander' of the first scene as the motto of the entire drama. 'Wir kennen uns ja einander', says Camille, in a seldom quoted line of the last act (IV.5.71). Their sense of comradeship, their banter and bluntness with each other, and their sometimes quite gentle support of each other combine to render the atmosphere of a large part of the second half of the play moving and even uplifting, despite many of their speeches in which they espouse a total cynicism in regard to human behaviour, or to what is often called human dignity.

They pour scorn right up to the scaffold on the religious Philippeau's attempts to place their lives and deaths in a context of religious meaning. Any one of them who makes a solemn speech about the defence of liberty, or the fight against despotism is cut down to size by an instant quip – 'Das sind Phrasen für die Nachwelt' (IV.5.70). Camille urges them all to strike no poses; people are all the same, 'Schurken und Engel, Dummköpfe und Genies und zwar das Alles in Einem' (IV.5.71). Of those who scream in the face of horrors and those who are stoically silent, Danton says, they are all Epicureans, creating the feeling with which they are most comfortable. A whole accumulation here of anti-heroic sentiment. But what is its effect? These men are on the point of dying at the guillotine; they know it and we know it. The more they deny the existence of bravery, of nobility, of heroism, the more, given the context, brave, noble, and heroic they actually seem. They face death together, without the benefit of self-delusion, religious or otherwise, and they die a courageous death. Who can watch their last moments, their attempts at humour, Danton's 'Ruhig, mein Junge', to Camille, Héault's 'Ach Danton, ich bringe nicht einmal einen Spaß mehr heraus', without being moved, without the strong emotional sensation that the heroes of the play are going bravely to their death? The historic last saying of Danton to the executioner: 'Kannst du verhindern, daß unsere Köpfe sich auf dem Boden des Korbes küssen?' (see Thiers, p.230) rings absolutely true in the atmosphere of this last scene. One is not tempted to say that it is a historic saying super-imposed on the cynical fictional Danton. The self-directed cynicism of the Dantonists does become in the shadow of the guillotine a kind of heroic despair.

The sense in which the Dantonists are heroic, and it is such a limited sense that perhaps one had better say, the sense in which they are not villains, becomes very clear when one contrasts them with the group of secondary revolutionaries around Robespierre. Fouquier-Tinville, public prosecutor, Herman and Dumas, presidents of the Revolutionary Tribunal, Barère,<sup>6</sup> Collot d'Herbois, Billaud-Varennes, members of the Committee of Public Safety – these were all, Büchner's sources

told him, lesser men of the Revolution. Thiers points out that with the Dantonists gone, there would be no one to rival St Just as the second man of the Republic (p. 199). Büchner depicts Robespierre's men as performing certain base acts which, according to his sources, they actually performed: Fouquier-Tinville and Herrmann pack the jury with hand-picked 'solides' for the Dantonists' trial (III.2.50 f.);<sup>7</sup> Billaud, Barrère, and Collot d'Herbois dispense with appeals from the gaols for mercy and medical help with hideous brutality (III.6.57 f.);<sup>8</sup> Dumas plans to 'divorce' his wife by sending her to the guillotine (IV.2.64 f.);<sup>9</sup> with St Just they all seize with glee on a trumped-up charge of sedition to end the hearings of the Dantonists and send them to the guillotine (III.6.58; Thiers, pp. 225 f.). These are all historically authenticated acts performed by real people. It is surely misleading to suggest that such characters are as Henry J. Schmidt says of Dumas, 'caricatures of revolutionary zeal' (Schmidt (1970), p. 64). Büchner, according to Schmidt, sees in Dumas a figure 'who would sacrifice his wife to the revolutionary ideal, an extreme extrapolation of St Just's political principles'. But the character who says, as Büchner's Dumas says, 'das Revolutionstribunal wird unsere Ehescheidung aussprechen, die Guillotine wird uns von Tisch und Bett trennen', is the same kind of man as the Dumas of the sources who swore a hundred times that he would have all his relatives killed. Such men are not caricatures so much as base characters performing recognizably base acts. Baseness in times of human agony is as real as heroism, and as unmistakable.

That these are the men who support the virtuous Robespierre presents us already with a paradoxical situation. Not content with it, Büchner elaborates further on their 'vices'; as soon as Barrère, Billaud, and Collot d'Herbois are left alone by the virtuous St Just, they launch into a conversation for all the world like that of the Dantonists in the Palais Royal. Barrère, in words that could come as easily from Lacroix, says of Robespierre and St Just: 'Sie werden noch aus der Guillotine ein Specificum gegen die Lustseuche machen. Sie kämpfen nicht mit den Moderirten, sie kämpfen mit dem Laster' (III.6.59). 'Laster' is equated here, of course, not with their own general viciousness but with sexual excesses. They proceed to talk of Clichy, their own hide-away for sexual orgies, and end up by mocking Robespierre's impotence more brutally than does Danton.

Now, if Büchner's intention here is to show that the followers of Robespierre are as licentious as those of Danton, he succeeds. In fact, the connexions of Barère and his friends with Clichy does receive a small mention in at least one of Büchner's sources, and as such is more precisely authenticated than Danton's whores.<sup>10</sup> But why their licentiousness is introduced and emphasized here is a debatable point. If it is to underline their clearly villainous characters then that seems to put the rhapsodic appeals of the Dantonists for sexual freedom in a rather strange light: why should sex orgies for the Dantonists be applauded and philosophically justified, while sex orgies for the Robepierrists are just another aspect of their general nastiness? It can be suggested that this exchange of theirs is intended to make non-

sense of Robespierre's intention to base his new republic on 'virtue', since his own supporters are undermining it behind his back. This assumes, of course, that virtue means abstinence from sexual promiscuity. One could in fact eliminate this whole sexual exchange – for 'virtue' read integrity and honesty – and these men would still be undermining any virtuous republic. They are a bad lot. The most determined propaganda on the rights of all to enjoy sex cannot make even their sexual excesses into something pleasant. Barrère himself, left alone, promptly describes his colleagues as 'Ungeheuer', and 'Ungeheuer' they are, sexual exploits and venereal diseases aside.

Barrère is the only one of them whom we see alone with his thoughts, and they are an interesting example of one of Büchner's attempts to imagine the private thoughts of a public figure. The political reputation of the real Barère, according to Büchner's sources, was that of a turncoat, a man who matched his ideas with some alacrity to the winning side. At this point in his career he belonged, in the lurid language of *Unsere Zeit*, among the 'Ungeheuer' on Robespierre's side; it is in *Unsere Zeit* that one finds the passage describing how these 'monsters' of the Committee of Public Safety found recreation from their 'blutige Arbeit' at Clichy and other country houses where they consumed expensive wines and foods in the company of 'feile Dirnen, die sich diesen Tigern preisgaben' (p.233). These are obviously Büchner's 'monsters' and 'tigers' – he uses both words to describe them.<sup>11</sup> Barrère shudders at the brutality expressed by these 'Ungeheuer', this after having sounded brutal enough himself in their company. His pangs of conscience are said by the critics of the sources to be 'unhistorical', and so they are in the sense that there is no record of Barère's questioning his own motives. There is, however, a very interesting discussion by Mignet of Barère's character; it occurs in the chapter after the one in which he describes the fall of the Dantonists, and it seems entirely possible that Büchner read it (Chapter IX, pp.443 f.).

Mignet describes Barère as 'un des plus souples instruments du comité', but not one who supported the regime of terror through fanaticism or cruelty. He was mild-mannered, his private life was irreproachable, 'il avait une très grande modération d'esprit. Mais il avait peur.' Then after describing how he had been a constitutional royalist before 10 August,<sup>12</sup> a moderate republican before 31 May,<sup>13</sup> and had now become an active member and advocate of the Committee of Public Safety, Mignet pauses and comments:

Cela fait voir que dans une révolution, il ne faut pas être acteur, si l'on manque de caractère. L'esprit seul n'est pas assez inflexible, il est trop accommodant; il trouve des raisons à tout, même à ce qui le dégoûte ou l'épouvante; il ne sait jamais vous arrêter à propos, dans un temps où il faut toujours être prêt à la mort, et finir son rôle là où finissent ses opinions. (pp. 443 f.)

This is a nicely put characterization of Barère, and regardless of whether it is 'true to life' or not, it convinces. One should take note that there is no one historical Barère: the mild-mannered, spineless, devious Barère of Mignet, with his irre-

proachable private life, is a different person from the libertine, blood-thirsty monster of *Unsere Zeit*. Büchner is stretching our credibility somewhat in running them together, but he succeeds in this instance mainly through the subtlety of Barrère's little monologue. Obviously Büchner, like Mignet, is interested in the motivation of these men who carried out some of the most brutal and treacherous deeds of the Revolution; since he is writing a play, and not the reflective history of Mignet, he makes the characters themselves reflect upon their motives. Barrère's reflections are subtle, and plausible for a man who is not at all ready to die for his principles. He has joined the 'monsters', just as a prisoner in the September gaoil massacres allied himself with the assassins; by knifing a priest, he saved his own life.<sup>14</sup> 'Wer kann was dawider haben?' he asks, and one has a momentary sneaking sympathy for the prisoner's act. His own circumstances are similar, he argues, only more complicated. Here one begins to look sceptically at him; he is rationalizing his own cowardice, obviously. But he knows it. If the prisoner could kill one man, he thinks, why not two or three or more? Plenty here for the conscience to feed on: 'Komm mein Gewissen, komm mein Hühnchen, komm bi, bi, bi, da ist Futter.' And in any case, he asks himself, was he really such a prisoner? Well, it's all the same, he was threatened with death . . . and off he goes, not an admirable man, but one wryly aware of his own lack of character (III.6.59 f.). This is very nice, and one of the best little touches of character-exploration in the play.

When sketching a person so slightly, there is a very thin line between 'hinting at a complexity of character'<sup>15</sup> which Büchner does rather successfully in Barrère, and, alternatively, thrusting one's own ideas about a person into the mind of the character himself. Büchner, in writing *Dantons Tod*, clearly had certain ideas himself about human beings in general and the way they behave. 'Die Unterschiede sind so groß nicht, wir sind alle Schurken und Engel', says Camille, and this is an idea which Büchner emphasizes in words throughout the play. Claims are made by a variety of characters for self-gratification as their prime motivating force, and for the attendant impossibility of passing moral judgements on anybody, or making critical distinctions between their various activities. Small wonder that critics who listen to the words suggest that Büchner is deliberately making nonsense of traditional values. And yet there are other critics who do not apparently listen to these particular words, and who have written whole interpretations of *Dantons Tod* without suggesting any such thing. This is not simply because critics select quotations to suit their own arguments, but at least partly because the words are so often undercut by the characters themselves. In Barrère, who makes no actual statement of principle, Büchner does for a moment capture the sense of the idea that we are all 'Schurken' and 'Engel'. Barrère is an obvious 'Schurke', and if the audience fleetingly understands and identifies with him, then Büchner has made his point more effectively than in any number of pronouncements on the subject.

Not only does the actual bravery of the Dantonists in effect undercut their anti-heroic statements, but the actual villainy of their opponents for the most part

undercuts such statements too. Who can be in any doubt, for example, that Laflotte is a coward, a liar, a traitor? Yet at the end of the scene in which he resolves to betray his cell-mate Dillon along with the Dantonists in order to save his own skin, he produces his piece of reasoning based squarely on the principle of self-gratification. He fears the pain of the guillotine: 'Der Schmerz ist die einzige Sünde und das Leiden ist das einzige Laster, ich werde tugendhaft bleiben' (III.5.56), an unexceptionable piece of logic in terms of the speech made by Thomas Payne<sup>16</sup> a few scenes earlier, which Laflotte did not hear, but which he nonetheless echoes verbally: 'Ich handle meiner Natur gemäß', said Payne, 'was ihr angemessen, ist für mich gut und ich thue es und was ihr zuwider, ist für mich bös und ich thue es nicht . . . Sie können, wie man so sagt, tugendhaft bleiben und sich gegen das sogenannte Laster wehren . . .' (III.1.49). One would like to see Büchner's Payne faced with Büchner's Laflotte as one embodiment of his idea, but he is not. Instead, one is left with a question mark: is Laflotte a deliberate parody of the philosophy enunciated by Thomas Payne? Does the character of Laflotte, in other words, render the principle absurd? Or is one really to apply the principle of Payne, and agree that Laflotte is not a villain, that the term has no meaning, that Laflotte is acting according to his nature, doing what pleases him, and cannot be judged good or bad? Certainly, if Payne were to make this statement about Laflotte, one could accept or reject it with equanimity. The confusion arises because Laflotte himself says it. In the mouth of 'le lâche Laflotte' of the sources,<sup>17</sup> what might be a valid enough commentary on his behaviour becomes a hollow piece of casuistical reasoning, which must be greeted with scepticism by any audience. Does that mean that the idea of self-gratification as an abiding principle of action, the idea of the non-validity of the concepts of good and evil as expounded elsewhere in the play, must be treated with scepticism? Probably not. More probably Büchner himself takes it very seriously, but as a young dramatist has not yet fully mastered the art of illustrating ideas obliquely through characters, rather than strewing them at will through the dialogue; if he really wanted any audience not to react to Laflotte as to a contemptible man, he would have had to hint at some plausible complexity of character, as he did in the case of Barrère. All the talk of the relativity of good and evil is not much more than a philosophic veneer if the characters themselves have the force of old-fashioned villains and heroes. Little difference that they are all 'Epicureans': not one of the Dantonists grovels his way to the scaffold, and Laflotte in grovelling his way out of gaol remains 'le lâche Laflotte'.

The French Revolution is of course an extremely difficult context in which to make a convincing real case for the abstract point that people are basically all one, acting on the same selfish motives. Faced, for example, with the reality of people who chose to die with those they loved, and other people who chose to consign their whole families to the guillotine, Büchner himself seems moved by the one, and revolted by the other: Dumas is a recognizable 'Schurke' and Julie is a recognizable 'Engel'. In the second half of the play, where the Dantonists are facing death in



gaol, and the Robespierrists are sordidly and brutally conniving against them, all the emotional force of the action leaves an ineradicable impression, certainly on the theatre audience, of the dying heroism of the Dantonists and the villainy of their tormentors. Although in the course of the play, a whole variety of characters—as diverse as Marion, Danton, Laflotte, Thomas Payne, and Camille — have told us in implausibly similar language that there is no way of judging people, they are all the same, this theory simply does not weigh heavily enough to tip the emotional balance of these particular scales.

There is, however, a rather different set of scales in the play in which this same abstract argument has also emotional weight on its side. Büchner has gone out of his way to introduce it very strongly into a particular historical setting where it has little chance of convincing anybody, and obviously he must have a powerful reason for doing this. There is a particular context within the play where suddenly the argument is strong, not tacked on or self-defeating, but central and convincing, and it is here that we must look for Büchner's own intellectual and emotional involvement with it: we find it in the context of what he chooses to present as the crux of the confrontation between Robespierre and Danton — the confrontation, that is, between 'Tugend' and 'Laster'.

## CHAPTER III

### DANTON AND ROBESPIERRE: HISTORICAL ANTAGONISTS

#### 1. *The Confrontation of Virtue and Vice*

Danton, as we have already noted, does not give us any very tangible sense of his political motivation in the struggle against Robespierre. His early remark that he had begun the struggle because he could not look at 'pompous Catos' without wanting to give them a kick, seemed a shallow enough reason to be dismissed as an idle quip. One has second thoughts, however, when his one and only confrontation scene with Robespierre turns out to hinge on the substance of this very quip. Most of the scene consists precisely of Danton's verbally kicking a pompous Robespierre, mocking his hypocritical posturing in a series of caustic and witty comments.

The notion of making this a personal rather than a political confrontation might well have come to Büchner from *Unsere Zeit*, where Danton, urged by his friends to make a political move after the execution of the Hébertists, seeks out Robespierre:

Nachdem er [Robespierre] ihm die Reize der Tugend geschildert hatte, überhäufte er ihn mit Spott über seine Glücksumstände, über die Annehmlichkeiten seines zurückgezogenen Lebens, über seine köstlichen Mahlzeiten und die große Aussteuer seiner Frau u.s.w. Danton zeigte sich bei dieser Unterredung . . . schwach. Er ließ keine Drohungen hören, und donnerte nicht gegen Robespierres blutige Tugend. (p. 92)

Significantly, Büchner reverses this situation. His Robespierre is the weak partner in the dialogue, and Danton does the very thing which, according to *Unsere Zeit*, he did not do: he thunders against Robespierre's 'blutige Tugend'. Büchner introduces a short political exchange at the beginning of the scene where it looks for a moment as if the two opposing political stands are about to be argued out. 'Where self-defence stops, murder begins', says Danton, 'there is no need to go on killing.' 'The social revolution is not over', says Robespierre, 'he who completes a revolution by halves, digs his own grave.'<sup>1</sup> High society is not yet dead. The healthy strength of the people must replace the effete class. Vice must be punished. Virtue must rule by terror.' Here we have the classic problem of the active revolutionary: when is the revolution over? It is the heart of what Peacock calls the historical play which in his view is potentially there in *Dantons Tod*; this short initial exchange places us in what he calls 'the moment in the Revolution where judgement is divided as to ends

and means, success and failure. The advantages of the new order are not immediately gained, the promises are not fulfilled. In the name of the same initial idealism, some wish to call a halt, whilst others wish to go forward with still greater vigour' (p. 183): certainly a moment fraught with political tension and with dramatic possibilities.

What does Büchner do with it? Robespierre's use of the word 'punish' – vice must be punished – elicits a violent response from Danton who launches into personal vituperations against Robespierre's 'outrageous' virtue, his pleasure at being more virtuous than others, his hypocritical refusal to admit that he takes pleasure in it, in acting the role of 'Policeysoldat des Himmels', and trying to coerce everyone else to live by his moral standards. The culminating point is Danton's complete denial of the concepts of virtue and vice, and his particular formulation of the basic motivating principle of human action: 'Es gibt nur Epicuräer und zwar grobe und feine, Christus war der feinste; das ist der einzige Unterschied, den ich zwischen den Menschen herausbringen kann. Jeder handelt seiner Natur gemäß d.h. er thut, was ihm wohl thut' (I.6.27). Robespierre produces no counter-argument to this. He neither denies nor agrees with this explanation of human motivation. Instead, he makes a comment which, denuded of all political context, sounds like a feeble rationalization of a weak position: 'Danton, das Laster ist zu gewissen Zeiten Hochverrat.' This, in a political debate rooted in the context of the Revolution, would have been a very strong argument. The disrupted and deprived society of Revolutionary France could ill afford to tolerate vice, in the sense in which the word is most frequently used in Büchner's sources: corruption, accepting money from dubious sources, conspiring or appearing to conspire with remnants of the old aristocracy, émigrés and the representatives of enemy countries, showing evidence of newly acquired wealth, buying up 'biens nationaux' (confiscated properties and lands), living in style and dining with bankers while the people went hungry. Accusations and counter-accusations of this kind, some wilder, some better-founded than others, were made by all factions against each other: the Dantonists and Robespierrists against the Hébertists, the Hébertists against the Dantonists, and so on. No one could level such charges against Robespierre, and in this sense he was and was known to be incorruptible.

In Büchner's play, 'Laster' has from the start had a different emphasis, and here in the confrontation scene, that emphasis is crystal clear. 'Laster' consists in what Danton here accuses Robespierre of *not* doing: 'Du hast kein Geld genommen, du hast keine Schulden gemacht, du hast bey keinem Weibe geschlafen, du hast immer einen anständigen Rock getragen und dich nie betrunken. Robespierre du bist empörend rechtschaffen' (I.6.26). 'Laster' in these terms is not only taking bribes, but all those other things which respectable bourgeois society has the leisure to wage war against in times of peace – getting into debt, sleeping with women, wearing unacceptable clothes, and getting drunk. The anger of Büchner's Danton is directed against Robespierre's wishing to force this kind of personal morality on

his fellow-citizens. His anger is completely convincing, and he carries the audience, certainly the modern audience, with him. Robespierre's prim response, 'Mein Gewissen ist rein', is infuriatingly self-satisfied. Virtuous, self-righteous, pompous people are rarely likeable. It is comforting to most of us sinners to be able to dismiss their virtue (particularly if it seems to be real and unimpeachable) as the way in which they get their form of pleasure; they are then no better than the rest of us, only more self-deluded. Not only is it comforting, but it has enough psychological truth to be a genuine argument, if not against virtue, then certainly against self-righteousness. One feels the emotional sincerity of the anger which drives Danton to dispute Robespierre's right to expose the dirty linen of other people just because his own coat is clean: why should he care, provided they leave him in peace? Hear, hear, says the modern audience.

Yet such anger, such argument, such approval have very little to do with the 'real' Revolution, where financial corruption and attendant luxurious living were signs that certain revolutionaries were establishing their property stakes in the new *status quo*, and were a danger to the completion of the revolutionary process. They were not in that sense simply enjoying themselves, minding their own business and leaving Robespierre and the rest of the world in peace.<sup>2</sup> This was a time when Danton, the former arch-revolutionary, was known by everyone to be enjoying what the Robespierre of *Unsere Zeit* scornfully called his 'Glücksumstände', 'die Annehmlichkeiten seines zurückgezogenen Lebens'; one can well imagine that Danton did not indeed raise a voice against Robespierre's 'blutige Tugend'. Certainly there was no chance at all that he would answer charges of 'Laster' with the high-handed reply that in his opinion no such thing existed. At no point in all the violent cross-charges of the sources, does anyone answer to a charge of corruption by asserting that virtue and vice are relative terms. The idea is ludicrous in the volatile days of Paris in 1794. Desmoulins does at one point in his *Vieux Cordelier* express the idea that self-gratification is the prime human motive; he does so when advocating a drive towards a comfortable and prosperous society in opposition to the Robespierrists' insistence on the necessity of an austere one. Quoting Robespierre's known idol, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, against him, he writes: 'L'amour de soi-même, dit J.-J. Rousseau, est le plus puissant, et même, selon moi, le seul motif qui fasse agir les hommes. Si nous voulons faire aimer la république, il faut donc . . . la peindre telle, que l'aimer, ce soit s'aimer soi-même.'<sup>3</sup> When he is himself accused, however, by Hébert of having married a rich wife and of dining with aristocrats, he leaps instantly and self-righteously to his own defence, insisting that his wife's dowry was not large, giving the whole history of his marriage, and assuring his readers that he lives a simple and modest life; he then of course, in the spirit of the times, proceeds to accuse Hébert in scathing terms, 'ce pauvre sansculotte Hébert', of having acquired a small fortune by misappropriating war-funds.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, when reading these accounts from a safe and objective distance, one might well say: all these men are feathering their own nests in one way or another.

To imagine however that any one of them would publicly justify or even admit it, is to misjudge mightily the climate of the times.

But Büchner's Danton is fighting a different battle, and it looks a lot more like a battle against bourgeois morality than a political counter-revolution. The real Dantonists were, as they all knew, in imminent danger of the terrible Paris gaols and the guillotine: one does not wage a war against prudery on the threshold of a concentration camp. Yet Büchner's Danton is not only waging such a war but Büchner chooses to make this war seem politically significant. In this scene, he uses Robespierre's historic political statement that virtue must rule by terror, and then through Danton's rejoinders, creates a particular kind of Robespierre, not the stern, dedicated, bloody revolutionary who spoke these terrible words, but a puritanical moralist who is against sex and drinking and getting into debt, and doesn't want anyone to enjoy himself. This vindictive Robespierre then appears to be persecuting a harmless, pleasure-loving Danton to punish him for his sins. It is important, I think, to recognize that this interpretation of the two personalities does affect the politics of the situation in a quite drastic way. It is no mere chance that much of the most heated critical debate over *Dantons Tod* centres on the emotional political question of whether Büchner himself was on the side of Danton or of Robespierre. Viëtor interprets the confrontation as a clear triumph for Danton, who exposes Robespierre's concept of 'Tugend' and 'Laster' as 'ideologische Kampfmittel eines von Ressentiment zerfressenen Despoten, als pompöse Maskierungen minderwertiger Motive', and goes on to say: 'Daß Büchner in dieser Auseinandersetzung auf Dantons Seite ist, kann nicht zweifelhaft sein (Viëtor (1949), pp.135 f.). He is in a sense absolutely right: all Büchner's creative enthusiasm in this scene goes into Danton's 'exposure' of the hollowness and hypocrisy of Robespierre's principles. Yet Lukács's fury at this interpretation which implies Büchner's own rejection of Robespierre's politics is also understandable. He argues quite correctly: 'Danton widerlegt mit keinem Wort die *politische* Anschauung Robespierres' (see Martens (1965), p.209). Danton's victory in his eyes is a cheap conquest by the philosophical materialist of the naive Rousseauian moralist, which does not begin to address the central political question which for Lukács is the opposition of the poor and the rich. Since there is much evidence in Büchner's political activities and in his letters that he was on, as it were, the Robespierre side in this crucial political opposition, then the suggestion that Danton's victory over Robespierre is a political one, and that Büchner is on his side, is of course an infuriating one. I do not think that one quite solves this problem, however, by suggesting, as does Lukács, that Robespierre embodies Büchner's political convictions and Danton his philosophical attitudes, that as protagonists, they embody an irreconcilable conflict in Büchner himself (*ibid.*, p.214). This would rescue Büchner the dramatist, and make the confrontation scene into a dramatic presentation of this conflict. I do not think that it is anything like so organized.

It seems to me rather that Büchner has allowed his picture of the two personalities, the prude on the one hand and the sensualist on the other, to dominate the politics of the first act of the play, and to lead him as a dramatist into a blind alley from which he does not very effectively emerge. In order to understand this, one has to look rather carefully at what Büchner is doing with Robespierre's politics, not only in the confrontation scene itself, but in the scenes which precede it. It soon becomes clear that the straightforward equation which Lukács makes between the dramatic figure of Robespierre and the 'consistent democratic-plebeian politics' of Büchner himself is a little bit too straightforward.

## 2. *Robespierre's 'Tugend' and Robespierre's Politics*

The general assumption in Büchner criticism, regardless of whether critics are on the Right or on the Left, of whether they 'approve' or 'disapprove' of Danton or of Robespierre, is that while Büchner obviously emphasizes Robespierre's prudish personality, he *is* presenting his historic political stance. This is fostered by the use Büchner makes of quotations from his sources: the long speech in the Jacobin Club in the first act, for instance, is always described as a more or less historic speech. I would suggest, however, that the emphasis on Robespierre's prudish personality combines with the emphasis on Danton's sexual immorality to distort fairly significantly Robespierre's historic political stance, not this stance as I see it, but as Büchner himself found it reported in his sources. The so-called historic speech to the Jacobins, in particular, was never made by Robespierre but is a very clever pastiche of Büchner's, serving his own ends of characterization as he must have viewed them in that early part of the play.

Before Robespierre even appears in the first act, the Dantonists have made their first appearance, advocating in the atmosphere of the gaming room 'Wohlbefinden' in the place of 'Tugend', and sensuous pleasure for all: the people have also made their first appearance, enraged at those who buy the flesh of their wives and daughters. Thus by the time Robespierre enters with his line, 'Armes, tugendhaftes Volk', the word 'Tugend' has already begun to take on the connotation of anti-sex, anti-pleasure, of abstinence and deprivation. It is in this way that Büchner sets the scene for Robespierre's 'historic' speech on his Republic of Virtue. It takes place, as does the whole play, after the execution of the Hébertists when historically Robespierre was under considerable pressure to show the same severity to the moderates and indulgents as he had to the ultra-revolutionaries. He received, according to Thiers, a letter from the extremists in Lyons, and this letter is converted by Büchner into the speech of the messenger from Lyons which opens the scene in the Jacobin Club. This speech does illustrate the kind of pressure that was being exerted on Robespierre at the time.<sup>5</sup> Robespierre's quite predictable response to the pressure of the Lyons patriots was to say that if the Hébertists had triumphed, the Convention would have been overthrown and the Republic would be in chaos, but to assure

his hearers also that it was no use to destroy one faction if a different kind of traitor remained alive. This is the gist of Thiers's one-page version of Robespierre's short reply (p. 197), and Büchner incorporates a few lines from it in his second paragraph (I.3.18: lines 2-6, 12-15). All the rest of the Jacobin Club speech is taken from elsewhere, much of it from the famous 'virtue and terror' speech, made in reality earlier, before the execution of the Hébertists, when Robespierre was attacking not simply the Dantonists, but the factions, and the dangers of factionalism itself. This speech occupies thirty-five pages in *Unsere Zeit* (pp. 22-57), and Büchner quotes from it piecemeal, adding some paragraphs of his own, as well as some lines actually said by St Just, and some even by Hébert. Since Büchner's speech is so widely held to be the very speech which Robespierre made to attack the Dantonists,<sup>6</sup> it may be useful to analyse it closely, and try to establish to what extent it is and is not historic.<sup>7</sup>

The core paragraph of the speech, the one on which its most important claim to historical accuracy rests, is the one which begins: 'Die Waffe der Republik ist der Schrecken, die Kraft der Republik ist die Tugend. Die Tugend, weil ohne sie der Schrecken verderblich, der Schrecken, weil ohne ihn die Tugend ohnmächtig ist' (I.3.18). Because, as the first paragraphs have declared, the ultra-revolutionaries who declared war on the deity and on private property have been eliminated, the full force of this core paragraph comes bearing down on the moderates, i.e. the Dantonists. The whole intent of this paragraph as phrased by the Robespierre of *Unsere Zeit* was a two-fronted attack on what he was then calling vice, not least the atheism and anarchy of the Hébertists, and on what he held to be premature calls for mercy and moderation by his old comrades in arms, the Dantonists. His insistence on virtue at that time was very much directed at the ultras, and his insistence on terror at the Dantonists,<sup>8</sup> the latter probably at least in part a counter-balance to placate the supporters of Hébert who thought he was being too soft on the moderates.<sup>9</sup> His concern, as expressed at great length in the 'virtue and terror' speech in *Unsere Zeit*, is with the maintenance of a government of the people, and this comes through much more clearly in the language of *Unsere Zeit* than in Büchner's language. Robespierre's statement of the 'virtue and terror' principle of government, for instance, reads thus:

Ist die Triebfeder der Volksregierung im Frieden die Tugend, so ist die Triebfeder der Volksregierung in einer Revolution zugleich die Tugend und der Schrecken: die Tugend, weil ohne sie der Schrecken verderblich, der Schrecken, weil ohne denselben die Tugend ohnmächtig ist. (pp. 34 f.)<sup>10</sup>

Büchner, in adapting this, does not simply adjust the language, introducing 'Waffe' for 'Triebfeder', but he omits completely Robespierre's distinction between times of peace and times of revolution, and most important, he does not in any way reproduce Robespierre's own preceding definition of what he means by virtue, which reads in *Unsere Zeit* as follows:

Welches ist nun das Fundamentalprinzip der demokratischen oder Volksregierung, d.h. die wesentliche Triebfeder, welche sie erhält und in Bewegung setzt? Es ist die Tugend: ich meine die öffentliche Tugend, welche in Griechenland und Rom so viel Wunder bewirkte, und im republikanischen Frankreich noch weit erstaunlichere bewirken muß: jene Tugend, welche nichts anders als Liebe für das Vaterland und die Gesetze ist. Da indessen das Wesen der Republik oder Demokratie die Gleichheit ist, so folgt daraus, daß Liebe zum Vaterland nothwendig Liebe zur Gleichheit in sich begreift. (p. 29)

What a difference such a definition of 'öffentliche Tugend' might have made to Büchner's Robespierre! Not only does his 'Tugend' remain undefined, but having interposed the historical Robespierre's attack on the Dantonists' call for mercy,<sup>11</sup> Büchner then invents a paragraph on 'Laster' (I.3.19, ll.5-15), again undefined but described suggestively as 'der feinste, gefährlichste und abscheulichste Angriff auf die Freiheit'. The last sentence of this paragraph is taken from Robespierre, but gives no sense at all of the long paragraph from which it is taken, in which Robespierre described 'der falsche Revolutionär', the man who appeared to be a dedicated revolutionary, but could be bought, who showed therefore harshness to the poor and indulgence to the rich.<sup>12</sup> Instead of defining 'Laster' in the next paragraph in any words of Robespierre, Büchner has recourse to a sentence spoken by Hébert when, in the fracas of accusatory speeches made by the factions against one another, he threw down the gauntlet to Robespierre who had been defending the so-called indulgents: Hébert said, 'Es ist Zeit, daß das Volk den Betrügern und Gaudieben zeige, daß ihre Herrschaft nicht ewig dauern wird. Menschen, welche sonst auf Dachstuben lebten, bewohnen jetzt Palläste, fahren jetzt in Carossen, und zehren an dem Marke des Volkes so unbefangen, als ob es für sie keine Guillotine gäbe' (*Unsere Zeit*, p.76). Robespierre picked up the gauntlet rather smartly, and Hébert was arrested and executed shortly thereafter. Büchner, however, takes Hébert's words, gives them to his Robespierre, omitting the notion of men who eat the marrow of the people, and substituting instead the words, 'und mit ehemaligen Marquisinnen und Baronessen Unzucht treiben', thus setting the tone of lascivious high living for the rest of his own invented paragraph (I.3.19, ll.19-26) describing the 'Marquis und Grafen der Revolution', the total picture of which absolutely fits the lustful Dantonists whom we have recently met in the gaming room of the first scene.

The speech thus builds naturally to its climactic ending in which Robespierre brands the call for mercy and moderation as a disguise for personal vice and weakness: 'Man sollte glauben, jeder sage zu sich selbst: "Wir sind nicht tugendhaft genug um so schrecklich zu seyn. Philosophische Gesetzgeber erbarmt euch unsrer Schwäche, ich wage euch nicht zu sagen, daß ich lasterhaft bin, ich sage euch also lieber, seydt nicht grausam!" ' This was never said by Robespierre, but by St Just, well before the arrest of the Hébertists in a speech describing the great problems of Revolutionary France, and claiming that its tyranny and terror were nothing compared with the tyranny of monarchs under whom millions were languishing



in the goals of Europe. Only the sword, he said, could guarantee freedom: the 'mitleidige Seelen' in the early days of the Revolution who spared their enemies had merely created disasters, such as the loss of a hundred thousand lives in the battles of the Vendée: such 'mercy' covered up weakness, and so he leads into the lines, 'Wir sind nicht tugendhaft genug . . .' which Büchner has appropriated as the grand and fitting climax for his virtuous Robespierre's speech (see *Unsere Zeit*, p.73).

Robespierre, in short, never mounted such a brilliant and concerted attack on the 'Laster' of the Dantonists. It is Büchner who mounts the attack, and when in the next scene Legendre asks Lacroix where Danton is, and Lacroix replies: 'Er sucht eben die mediceische Venus stückweise bey allen Grisetten des palais royal zusammen, er macht Mosaik, wie er sagt: der Himmel weiß bey welchem Glied er gerade ist' (I.4.20 f.), we are hardly surprised. Here is the lascivious Danton for whom Büchner's Robespierre has prepared us: at the same time we know that it is absurd to believe that Danton in exploring the bodies of the grisettes in the Palais Royal is thereby launching 'a fine, dangerous and disgusting attack on freedom'. And so we are also prepared to be on Danton's side when in the interview scene, he soundly trounces Robespierre for his prudery and hypocrisy.

For someone who has a real respect for Robespierre, and for Büchner's own 'plebeian democratic' politics, it is annoying to have to face the fact that he has very definitely narrowed and trivialized the political struggle between Danton and Robespierre. One has to face it, however, in order to understand what happens to his characters as the play goes on. Büchner continues after the first act by small omissions and juxtapositions to preserve the tone of the original 'Tugend/Laster' confrontation: Danton, for example, says in the second act, 'Die Jacobiner haben erklärt, daß die Tugend an der Tagesordnung sey' (II.1.32), a historic saying, except that when one checks the sources, one finds in no instance the single word 'Tugend' but, in *Unsere Zeit*, 'Gerechtigkeit und Tugend', in Mignet, 'la justice et la probité' and in Thiers, 'la justice, la probité et toutes les vertus républicaines'.<sup>13</sup> Or Barrère in the third act prefaces his statement, 'Sie kämpfen nicht mit den Moderirten, sie kämpfen mit dem Laster', with the tone-setting words, 'Sie werden aus der Guillotine ein Specificum gegen die Lustseuche machen'. Büchner continues, that is, in snatches of dialogue to narrow the concept of 'Tugend' by omission and trivialize the concept of 'Laster' by juxtaposition, just as he did in whole scenes of the first act. But he is no longer concentrating his attention on it. He has too many other things in mind.

This is not to deny that Büchner was, at the time when he wrote *Dantons Tod*, quite consistently and passionately opposed to a prudish and, as he sees it, hypocritical bourgeois morality. The figure of Robespierre, with his constant harping on Virtue and Vice, must have seemed to him a natural target whom he could not resist attacking – and who would deny that there is a self-righteous and priggish tone to many of Robespierre's historical speeches? One might argue that it was

quite legitimate for Büchner to single this out. Why should it matter if he gives us a less than historical Robespierre or a less than historical Danton or Desmoulins by eliminating much of their actual political programmes? If Büchner, the dramatist, is not interested in the historical political struggles of the French Revolution, then it does not matter that he presents his characters warring on the grounds of the rights of the individual to enjoy himself, rather than those of the political rights of man. But this, one must instantly object, is not so. There *is* a sense in which the writer of *Dantons Tod* is clearly interested in the historical political struggles of the French Revolution, and it is because of this interest that the kind of antagonism which he rather carefully sets up in the first scene of the play between Danton and Robespierre leads him into a blind alley. He has introduced a whole strand of argumentation into the play which hangs on the pleasure principle, and it is a political red herring. He has therefore a difficult problem of characterization on his hands particularly in regard to his two main characters, Danton and Robespierre. To see what he does with it, we have to take another look at them, through and beyond their battles over the territory of virtue and vice.

### 3. *The Private Agony of Two Revolutionaries*

Danton's denial of virtue and vice rings absolutely true when directed against the petty prejudices of a prudish and tyrannical Robespierre. Where is it some scenes later when he is tormented with remorse at the dead of night? 'There is no virtue, there is no vice, there are only Epicureans . . .'. So what were the bloody massacres in the gaols of Paris in September 1792? And why is Danton tormented with the memory of his responsibility for them? Here the battle against bourgeois morality is forgotten, and the terrible question of man's inhumanity to man has to be faced. 'Was ist das, was in uns hurt, lügt, stiehlt und mordet?' asks the Danton of this scene in his agony. It would seem flippant in the context to interpose the answer: 'Man tut, was einem wohl tut.' This would not help the Danton who is tortured here by his own conscience – that 'Spiegel vor dem ein Affe sich quält' as he earlier defined it for the benefit of Robespierre.

Looking desperately for a justification of his actions, he runs through the course of events leading to the September massacres, and says, 'Das war Nothwehr, wir mußten'. This is the practical language of the pragmatic revolutionary, and also of the general social ethic: self-defence is not murder. But from this practical 'no choice', the 'muß' of 'my life or his', Büchner's Danton makes a leap of thought to quite a different 'muß'. The well-known biblical text comes for no obvious reason into his mind: 'It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh'. Why the Danton whom we have come to know, who scarcely believes in the inspired word of the man on the cross – 'the finest Epicurean of them all' – should take his 'muß' to be in any way definitive, is not clear, but he seems to. 'Das war dies Muß', he says, explaining his crimes then as being in some way determined. Who spoke the 'muß', he asks, what is it in us that whores,

lies, steals and murders? He answers himself with metaphors – we are marionettes manipulated by unknown powers, swords in the unseen hands of spirits – metaphors which would seem only to pose further questions, but ‘Jetzt bin ich ruhig’, he says, and goes to bed.

This passage is much cited as being at the heart of Büchner’s Danton, the Danton who does not derive from the sources, purely imagined in the night time of his remorse, a creative deepening therefore of the ‘moderate revolutionary’ Danton, opponent of the ‘extreme revolutionary’ Robespierre. This makes sense except for two things. First of all, the shades of that other Danton of Büchner’s, the ‘Epicurean’, hover around: it is, for instance, considerably less than plausible for that Danton to ask in *anguish*, ‘Was ist es, was in uns hurt?’. Secondly, if one reads it seriously as the thought of the political revolutionary Danton, it is not a very strong ending to an agony of remorse: the suggestion that atrocities are the handiwork of unknown powers and unseen spirits has only to be imagined on the lips of some more immediately familiar war criminal, let us say, for it to sound like a very weak rationalization.

That critics seem unperturbed by both these reservations regarding the plausibility of the passage as an expression of Danton’s character, suggests to me that they do not read this passage simply and solely as a thought of Danton’s in its context. Everyone knows that Büchner is here giving Danton an old thought of his own, expressed in a letter to his fiancée written 10 March 1834, some nine months before he wrote *Dantons Tod*, at a time when he was studying the history of the French Revolution. There is scarcely a critic who discusses Danton’s speech without alluding to this, and it is indeed almost impossible to read the utterance of Danton without supplying the known perspective of the writer Büchner. In Danton’s speech are missing for obvious reasons the opening sentences of Büchner’s which supply the thoughts with their real coherence: ‘Ich studierte die Geschichte der Revolution. Ich fühlte mich wie zernichtet unter dem gräßlichen Fatalismus der Geschichte.’ With this preface, the reactions of the young Büchner himself make complete sense: they are essentially no more than a series of impressions written in the heat of the moment, and should not be glorified out of all proportion into a coherent philosophy, but they do have a strong emotional coherence, and are powerfully expressed:

Ich finde in der Menschennatur eine entsetzliche Gleichheit, in den menschlichen Verhältnissen eine unabwendbare Gewalt, Allen und Keinem verliehen. Der Einzelne nur Schaum auf der Welle, die Größe ein bloßer Zufall, die Herrschaft des Genies ein Puppenspiel, ein lächerliches Ringen gegen ein ehernes Gesetz, es zu erkennen das Höchste, es zu beherrschen unmöglich. Es fällt mir nicht mehr ein, vor den Paradegäulen und Eckstehern der Geschichte mich zu bücken. Ich gewöhnte mein Auge ans Blut. Aber ich bin kein Guillotinenmesser. Das *muß* ist eins von den Verdammungsworten, womit der Mensch getauft worden. Der Ausspruch: es muß ja Aergerniß kommen, aber wehe dem, durch den es kommt, – ist schauderhaft.

Was ist das, was in uns lügt, mordet, stiehlt? Ich mag dem Gedanken nicht weiter nachgehen (II, pp. 425 f.).

This is the completely sincere outburst of a young man, himself a budding revolutionary, who has subjected himself to a steady reading diet of version after version of the bloody events of the French Revolution; one responds with sympathy to his sense of the terrible sameness of human nature, of some inescapable force controlling human circumstances, his personal revulsion at the flowing of so much blood, his outrage that man seems forced to commit offences against other men, his questions as to what it is that forces him to perform vile acts; obviously these are deeply felt emotional reactions to the history of the French Revolution. Equally obviously, they are not altogether the emotional reactions of individuals who were actually caught up in the events of the Revolution. Riouffe, the Girondist, did not feel that his 'nature' was the same as that of the Jacobins, those 'scourges of humanity' who had put him in gaol (see Riouffe, e.g. p.71). Camille Desmoulins, in gaol, felt that he had been put there by his old friend Robespierre, not by the iron law of necessity. So did Danton. Büchner had looked at the events of the French Revolution from the viewpoints of a variety of different individuals, and was understandably left with the feeling that it was all one: whichever way you looked at it, events went rolling on in a seemingly inexorable fashion. That he wanted to build the sense of this into his own drama of the Revolution is perfectly natural. But the attempt to build it into the actual emotional reactions of his characters, active and biased participants in the Revolution itself, is bound to cause confusion, particularly when he also builds into them very successfully other emotional reactions altogether appropriate to active participants in the Revolution, much stained with blood.

The greater part of the night-time scene shows Danton's agony of remorse, and it is powerful and convincing: nightmares of remorse in the hours of darkness are something we all imagine must be suffered by the perpetrators of great crimes, and the September massacres were a hideous crime, as Büchner, who had undoubtedly read the particularly gory accounts in *Unsere Zeit*, well knew. Danton's terror, the word 'September' ringing in his ears, his dreams of riding the globe like a wild horse and being dragged down by it — all this adds an impressively imagined dimension to the character of the historical revolutionary, Danton. It is to the remorse of a man who feels responsible for his crimes that we respond, rather than to what he says about being a sword in unseen hands. But if we do not take what he says altogether seriously, as an expression of what he feels, Büchner obviously takes it seriously as an expression of what he suspects Danton to be, and not only Danton, but all the rest of the men of the Revolution. Büchner is the one who is playing with the notion that they are all puppets manipulated by unknown forces, and this is bound, for example, to undercut his presentation with any real conviction of violent political antagonisms between men of opposing principles. One has

only to place Danton's remorse scene alongside Robespierre's earlier monologues to see that Büchner's heart simply is not in any such presentation.

The monologues follow immediately upon the confrontation scene of the first act, and show us Robespierre, the revolutionary, beginning to emerge from Robespierre, the prig. At the end of the confrontation, one serious political-moral issue arose, apparently as an afterthought of Danton's, and in fact coming straight out of the historical sources:

*Danton.* Übrigens, um bey deinen Begriffen zu bleiben, unsere Streiche müssen der Republik nützlich seyn, man darf die Unschuldigen nicht mit den Schuldigen treffen.

*Robespierre.* Wer sagt dir denn, daß ein Unschuldiger getroffen worden sey?  
(I.6.27)<sup>14</sup>

Here, for an instant, is the terrifying real Robespierre: is he hypocritical or self-deluded? The possibilities are considerable for the exploration of hypocrisy or self-delusion in the man who fervently preached virtue, while daily sending people to the guillotine. These possibilities are completely overshadowed in the interview scene itself by that other kind of hypocrisy or self-delusion whereby a man who is prudishly virtuous considers himself better than his fellows. They are, however, unlike the latter, absolutely germane to an exploration of the character Robespierre, politician, and there are some moments in the subsequent monologues where they make themselves felt.

When Danton leaves the stage, Robespierre's first words, invented by Büchner, 'Geh nur! Er will die Rosse der Revolution am Bordell halten machen' (I.6.28), simply confirm the impression that his main quarrel is with Danton's loose-living and immorality, but then he begins to delve more interestingly into his own motivation for wanting to remove Danton from the political scene. Is he jealous of Danton's greater stature? Is his virtue simply a prop to his pride? Does he absolutely have to get rid of him? Yes, of course, the Republic, Danton has to go: 'Weg mit einer Gesellschaft, die der todten Aristocratie die Kleider ausgezogen und ihren Aussatz geerbt hat.' Here are the beginnings of a political argument, but the question of virtue returns to point its bloody finger at him: he does not know if he is lying to himself.

The fact that Robespierre should be hampered at this point in making his own political case by questions of his own motivation is not in the least damaging to the speech. That a real revolutionary on the point of sending a comrade to the scaffold should stop in the silence of his thoughts and ask himself why – are his motives pure, is he doing it for the Republic, or for himself? – this is entirely believable. He is beginning to argue out the problem of reconciling his 'virtue' with his crimes. But the solution of Büchner's Robespierre at this point is to go to the window, look out at the night, and more or less declare it a non-problem: 'Sin is in our thoughts', he says, 'whether the thought becomes deed or not, that is chance.' We are left

open-mouthed and incredulous. It cannot be accepted as a serious rationale for political murder, so is it just hypocritical double talk on the part of an unscrupulous Robespierre? And yet the monologue up to this point has seemed anything but hypocritical. Certainly a dramatist who had wanted to show a Robespierre struggling honestly with the painful problem of his own motivation could not have done better. The obvious misgivings of Robespierre in the subsequent exchange with St Just, his real pain particularly at the condemnation of Camille, his nervous insistence that it be done quickly if it has to be done, these do not seem to be intended as hypocritical. Nor do they seem to have much to do with the musing sequence at the window in which Robespierre plays with the notion that our waking actions and our dream actions are scarcely distinguishable one from another.

Left alone again, this time by St Just, he now squarely shoulders the responsibility for his crimes: 'Ich nehme die Sünde auf mich.' He does so in what has been regarded as a 'madly presumptuous thought' (see Benn (1976), p.126), in that he accepts the title of 'Blutmessias' suggested by Camille. He says: 'Er hat sie mit seinem Blut erlöst und ich erlöse sie mit ihrem eignen. Er hat sie sündigen gemacht und ich nehme die Sünde auf mich. Er hatte die Wollust des Schmerzes und ich habe die Quaal des Henkers' (I.6.30). It is not often observed that this 'madly presumptuous' comparison is very close to the key thought of Danton's 'muß' speech: 'Der Mann am Kreuze hat sich's bequem gemacht: es muß ja Aergerniß kommen, doch wehe dem, durch welchen Aergerniß kommt.' It is easier for the man on the cross who decrees the necessity of offences than for the man through whom the offences come. In fact, the phrase which Robespierre uses to describe the sufferings of Christ – 'die Wollust des Schmerzes' – would have sat just as easily on the lips of Danton, for whom Christ was the finest Epicurean of them all. The difference between Danton and Robespierre here is that Robespierre does for this moment take upon himself the responsibility for the bloodshed of others, discounting apparently his earlier thought that chance decides whether thoughts become actions. He accepts the torment of the executioner, seeming thus to make his cross a harder one to bear than that of Christ, who in making others sin against him, accepted himself the voluptuousness of pain.<sup>15</sup> This speech is not, of course, in any objective sense a vindication of his shedding of blood; it does no more for his victims than Danton's assigning his to an unknown fate. But it rings true as an expression of Robespierre's character, and does not have the hollow sound of a thought thrust by the writer unceremoniously into his head. It does fit – as his evasive dream idea does not – the 'virtuous' Robespierre, the moralistic, carping dimension of whom Büchner has already stressed. It begins to measure up to the man whom Thiers described as 'un des êtres les plus odieux qui aient dominé les hommes, et on dirait les plus vils, s'il n'avait eu une conviction forte et une intégrité reconnue'.<sup>16</sup> To attribute to such a man the arrogant but devoutly held belief that he was saving mankind by shedding its blood, and that his own suffering was the cruellest, is a potential masterstroke of the dramatist. But just as Büchner diluted

Danton's remorse, so he dilutes Robespierre's 'blutige Tugend' (here the phrase is very much to the point) by having him turn around and examine his own thought, 'Und doch ist was von Narrheit in dem Gedanken', and then proceed to the enlightened conclusion that the Son of Man is crucified in us all; we all wrestle in bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane, but no one saves anyone with his wounds. The whole impact of the 'Blutmessias' is dissipated.

If Robespierre's monologue had moved straight from the line '. . .und ich habe die Quaal des Henkers', to the line, 'Mein Camille! Sie gehen Alle von mir – es ist Alles wüst und leer – ich bin allein', Act I would have ended with the core of a real giant of the Revolution, convinced of his rectitude, his martyrdom, shattered by the loss of his old friends, but about to send them to the guillotine. If such a man had confronted a Danton broken by remorse, one might have had a conflict of giants, a great historical drama of a recognizable kind. Our aim, however, here, is not to rewrite *Dantons Tod*, but to see it for what it is; and it is not, on the evidence of these two scenes, a conflict of historical giants, for Büchner himself has cut them both down to size even before the scenes come to an end. Yet when one is tempted to suggest that Büchner's real interest in *Dantons Tod* lies elsewhere than in the historic political struggles of the French Revolution, these two scenes themselves provide a powerful counter-argument. Certainly Büchner seems in both of them to have completely lost sight of that major personal conflict of the first act, the conflict between the hypocritical moralist and the open-hearted libertine. We, in responding to the play as a whole, have to keep that conflict also in view, and it is time to take stock of some of the problems involved in doing this.

#### 4. *Coherent Antagonists?*

One of the obvious problems in working out a coherent response to the Danton and Robespierre of Büchner's play is that Robespierre rapidly disappears from the scene altogether. The only appearance he makes after the monologue which ends Act I is in Act II Scene 6 when, after the arrest of the Dantonists, he makes a speech in the Convention denouncing them. This speech Büchner simply took, more or less word for word, from the speech which, according to Thiers (pp. 204-208) and *Unsere Zeit* (pp. 95-99), Robespierre actually made on that occasion. Even the applause which he includes comes straight from Thiers's account. It is a speech which says little in terms of general policy – nothing of the order of the earlier speeches in which he elaborates at great length on the ideology of Virtue and Terror. He makes no mention of the specific crimes for which the Dantonists are being indicted; that on the actual occasion was left to St Just. He includes no reference, direct or indirect, to their 'Laster'. He asks in rather simple terms why Danton should be treated any more mercifully than other famous men who have been sent to the guillotine; the Convention should not, he says, be afraid of the abuse of power on the part of the Committees. Whoever is afraid, is guilty, since innocence never trembles before public watchfulness. His old friendship with the Dantonists will not

hold him back, even if the danger they now run should one day be his own. There is in all of this a tone of self-righteous exhortation:

So erkläre ich denn, nichts soll mich aufhalten, und sollte auch Dantons Gefahr die meinige werden. Wir Alle haben etwas Muth und etwas Seelengröße nöthig. Nur Verbrecher und gemeine Seelen fürchten Ihresgleichen an ihrer Seite fallen zu sehen, weil sie, wenn keine Schaar von Mitschuldigen sie mehr versteckt, sich dem Licht der Wahrheit ausgesetzt sehen. Aber wenn es dergleichen Seelen in dießer Versammlung giebt, so giebt es in ihr auch heroische. Die Zahl der Schurken ist nicht groß. Wir haben nur wenige Köpfe zu treffen und das Vaterland ist gerettet. (II.7.45)

These are his closing words. The applause of the deputies mounts during the speech, in Büchner as in Thiers, and it is the combination of intimidation and flattery that causes Thiers to write of this speech, 'Jamais il [Robespierre] n'avait su être aussi habile et aussi perfide. Parler du sacrifice qu'il faisait en abandonnant Danton, s'en faire un mérite, entrer en partage du danger s'il y en avait un, et rassurer les lâches en parlant du petit nombre des coupables, était le comble de l'hypocrisie et de l'adresse' (p. 208). Whereas Thiers thus explicitly and unambiguously accuses Robespierre of hypocritical conniving, Büchner, in simply reproducing the speech as it stands, gives us absolutely no idea of whether he considers it the height of hypocrisy or not. In Act I, Robespierre was obviously made to appear a hypocrite in the interview scene, but in the two monologues, he seemed closer to an honest form of self-delusion, tempered, perhaps oddly, by insights into that delusion. This last speech 'speaks for itself'. Büchner has lavished no attention on it whatsoever, a great contrast to his careful structuring of the speech in the Jacobin Club. He has simply copied it out of his sources. There is no way of knowing how he construed the speech or what his intention was in introducing it into the text. Only one thing seems clear: he has no interest this time in showing a virtuous Robespierre pursuing the lascivious Dantonists. Indeed it is hard to escape the feeling that by this time in the play, he has not very much interest in Robespierre at all. Certainly, he never appears again.

Robespierre's disappearance from the play is at least partially illuminated by the passage from Büchner's letter quoted above (pp. 51-52), which he adapts for Danton's delivery but which surely colours his own attitude to all the other characters in the play. While Danton's speech ends on the note that men are manipulated by unknown powers, so that he seems to regard this as an answer to his agonized question, and even to find peace in it, this is not so in Büchner's letter. The order is reversed. Men are puppets, foam on the wave, subject to an iron law, he says, but still ends with the question, 'Was ist es, was in uns lügt, stiehlt, mordet?'.<sup>17</sup> He does not want, as he says at the time, to pursue this question, but it is obviously still exercising his mind in the writing of *Dantons Tod*, and the 'Epicurean' or 'sensationalist' idea is, in the abstract, one possible answer to it. Men's actions are dictated by their nature; they all naturally and instinctively respond to the feelings



of pleasure and pain, and one action cannot therefore be judged better than the other, since all actions are identically motivated. People do what is good for them. It is this 'answer' which is strongly in his mind in Act I. With his sense of the sameness of human nature, he seizes enthusiastically on the characters of Danton, the libertine, and Robespierre, the prude, intending to show their identical motivation; Danton very successfully drives the point home in the interview scene. As Büchner proceeds into the play, however, and his Danton and his Robespierre begin inevitably to contemplate the really massive personal dilemmas of the active revolutionary – the elimination of friends who have become politically dangerous, the slaughtering of faceless masses of people – the explanation of the Epicurean, 'Man tut, was einem wohl tut', is simply inadequate. Büchner has to essay other answers to this question of what it is in human beings that performs vile and cruel acts. The early personal conflict between Danton and Robespierre therefore loses momentum, and Robespierre, the hypocritical moralist, drops out of the play.

Büchner does not emerge, however, from the blind alley of the personal 'Tugend'/'Laster' confrontation into a larger, deeper version of a personal, moral, political antagonism between Danton and Robespierre, because his own intellectual misgivings about the responsibility of human beings for their acts do not allow him to see them in any significant sense as antagonists, even though, as in parts of Robespierre's monologue and in Danton's remorse scene, he 'feels' with them that they are responsible for their acts. Each of them meditates on his role in the Revolution: Danton declares that man is fighting the battles of unseen spirits, Robespierre, that chance changes thought into action, and all men are engaged in a death-struggle with themselves. If anyone took these conclusions seriously, the whole critical debate as to whether Büchner is on Danton's side or on Robespierre's should fall down completely. If Büchner really believes that no one is responsible for anything, and all men are the same, then it makes no sense to ask which side he is on.

It does not, in my opinion, make much sense to ask which side he is on, but I understand why critics go on doing it. In the two scenes which we have just discussed, there is some difficulty in reconciling the feeling that we are observing human beings responsible for their own behaviour, and the statements which tell us that we are not. There are not many critics who face up to this in the straightforward manner of A.H.J. Knight who says in general of the characters of *Dantons Tod*: 'Even if originally conceived under the influence of a logical, omnipresent, hopeless, deterministic philosophy, [they] may quite reasonably be criticized as if they had been created by a dramatist who believed in the freedom of the human will' (p. 87). This may be a little too straightforward, since it is quite difficult to criticize characters 'reasonably' when the dramatist's conception of these characters seems itself to be shaky. Not only do the two scenes discussed present their own inner contradictions, but neither of them is coherently welded into a convincing dramatic presentation of either Danton or Robespierre in the play as a whole. The ideas which they express are bound therefore to give rise to confusion. Ideas,

as we have already seen in a simple case like that of Laflotte, are not fixed entities. They change depending on who expresses them. It matters to the idea expressed, for example, whether or not the character is a hypocrite. If in *Dantons Tod* we cannot quite tell from the text who Danton is or who Robespierre is, we are likely to supply our own version of the historical Danton or Robespierre. It is close to impossible to respond in isolation to a pure thought expressed by someone who purports to be Danton or Robespierre! We react to the fictional character, the historical character, and the idea simultaneously, and in rather a complicated way. *Dantons Tod* arouses passionate political controversy among critics of differing political persuasions because Danton and Robespierre *are* on different sides of a political struggle, no matter how much they may protest in private that men are all one, thoughts are deeds, men are puppets ... and so on. Nothing enrages the critics of the political left more than the suggestion that Büchner is interested in metaphysical rather than political problems, and they are right to be enraged. There is an inherent absurdity in the suggestion that two characters called Danton and Robespierre are locked in purely metaphysical conflict. They are not. But the critic who tries in turn to show them locked in coherent political combat has to ignore parts of the text.

I do not think that it helps anyone to understand what Büchner was saying in *Dantons Tod* if one tries to create coherent characters, either dramatically, politically, or philosophically, out of the men who hold the stage in the play. Danton and Robespierre in particular are not coherent and they are not antagonists. The Robespierre who stands alone on the stage at the end of Act I, seeing himself with horror but with arrogant acceptance as the 'Blutmessias', could have gone on to be a real antagonist. As soon as he turns around, and sees that all men are wrestling in bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane, then it ceases to matter whether he appears in the play again or not. Others can carry on the debate which he, as a bloodstained revolutionary, has begun with himself, and others do. It is Danton whom we next see wrestling in the Garden: he thinks of the September massacres, and takes up for himself the question of what a bloody revolutionary is. And who is it who takes up the question at roughly the point where Danton leaves off? None other than St Just, whose speech before the Convention is one of the most powerful in the play, and a complete invention of Büchner's. St Just addresses himself directly to the question of what revolution is, and his speech merits close attention.

## CHAPTER IV

### ST JUST: A DUAL ROLE

#### 1. *The Politician St Just and his Speech on Nature and Time*

St Just is one of the few characters in *Dantons Tod* on whom the critics are united – united, that is, in their assessment of him as a committed, one-track-minded political revolutionary. Depending on their feelings about such a person, they either disapprove of him, using in his connexion words like ‘bloodthirsty, perverted’ (Knight, pp. 77 f.), ‘doktrinär fanatisch’ (Viëtor (1949), p. 143), ‘ideological fanatic’ (Benn (1976), p. 134), ‘unrelentingly rhetorical being’ (Lindenberger, p. 26), ‘starrer Doktrinär von grausiger eiskalter Logik’ (Büttner (1967), p. 25), or else they approve of him and call him such things as ‘die Verkörperung des tatkräftigen, ungebrochenen, plebejischen Revolutionärs’ (Lukács, p. 212). In any case, they are all seeing the same St Just, only with different eyes.

He appears only twice in the play outside his big speech, and regardless of one’s politics, one has surely to agree that he is not a personally appealing figure, shown as he is on both occasions hounding the Dantonists to their death, with none of Robespierre’s qualms at the sacrifice of old comrades, ready indeed as he says to throttle them with his own hands (III.6.57). In these scenes, one has admittedly no more sense of him as a motivated social revolutionary than one does of the Dantonists in the rest of the play, but considerably more sense of him as a practical politician, a man prepared and able to manoeuvre procedurally in the Convention. Büchner derives this side of St Just straight from the sources: Thiers, for example, describes how St Just seizes on the trumped-up charge of conspiracy, based on Laflotte’s deposition, and uses it to propose a decree which will end the hearings of the Dantonists in the Revolutionary Tribunal; telling the Convention that the accused are in full revolt, are menacing the Tribunal, and stirring up the people, he proposes a decree authorizing the exclusion from debate of those accused who do not show proper respect for justice (pp. 225 f.). Büchner takes this and converts it into a suggestion for action made by St Just to his fellow-revolutionaries; he then gives Barrère a nice comment on the methods of the historical St Just: ‘Du hast einen revolutionären Instinct, das lautet ganz gemäßigt und wird doch seine Wirkung thun. Sie können nicht schweigen, Danton muß schreien’ (III.6.58). This kind of parliamentary foot-work crops up a great deal in Thiers’s accounts of the Revolution, but it is almost the only occasion in Büchner’s play where he conveys

a real sense of what the 'revolutionary instinct' in this sense entailed. In these two scenes, we are presented with a slight but consistent and life-like picture of St Just, single-minded politician, committed to Robespierre and his policies, and unambiguously anti-Dantonist.

When this St Just then stands before the Convention and delivers his speech on the occasion of the public denunciation of the Dantonists, this speech is inevitably – and correctly in terms of what one may expect from a drama – judged as a speech of St Just's, and judged accordingly, that is, approved if one approves of St Just, disapproved if one does not. The name, St Just, in other words, set over the speech, not unnaturally predisposes the audience and critic in their attitudes to what is said. But as we have already seen in *Dantons Tod*, names and speeches have to be examined with some caution. If one takes a large part of St Just's speech, and reads it out of context, it suddenly stands out as a complete anomaly. What is it doing on the lips of this cold, clever, ruthless politician at this particular point in the Revolution? Certainly it is nothing like the real speeches of the cold, clever, ruthless St Just, master of slanderous personal invective. He it was, on the occasion in question, who enumerated the charges against the Dantonists, or, in Thiers's version, 'C'est lui, qu'on dechainait contre les victimes, parce qu'à la subtilité nécessaire pour faire mentir les faits et leur donner une signification qu'ils n'avaient pas, il joignait une violence et une vigueur de style rares' (pp. 208 f.). Büchner ignores this, but gives to Robespierre, as we have seen, the historical cunningly contrived political speech, designed to intimidate the Convention into realizing rapidly that they had to be with Danton or against him, and if they were with him, they were liable to suffer the same fate. His closing words, 'Die Zahl der Schurken ist nicht groß. Wir haben nur wenige Köpfe zu treffen und das Vaterland ist gerettet' (II.7.45), rather obviously warn the members of the Convention that they had better approve the sacrifice of these few heads. Small wonder that 'les lâches députés' rose in reality in hysterical applause (see Thiers, pp. 206 f.). Fearing mightily for their own heads, they are in no state to be interested in the calm and measured tones of a suddenly contemplative St Just, pondering within a global framework revolution and social change. That is, after all, what St Just is doing. Büchner brings his deputies to their feet again in long and sustained applause, but why they should applaud a statement which among other things coolly allows the immediate possibility of several hundred more corpses, thus completely overturning the tactic of Robespierre, it is not clear. One would expect them under the circumstances to be chilled to the marrow by such a speech. Not only was this speech not made on this occasion, but I suspect that it could not have been made on this occasion, at the height of the Terror, when heads were rolling and blood was flowing, not at any rate by a politician who wanted to stay in power, and to assure his fellows therefore that they would not all lose their heads at the guillotine. It is not a speech made by a politician, and in that sense, it is not a speech

made by St Just, Robespierre's political manoeuvrer, looking for real support from real and frightened deputies.

Those critics who regard it as a speech devised brilliantly and deviously by Büchner for the bloodthirsty villain, St Just, can become quite vituperative in their descriptions of it. Knight, for example, calls it a 'sententious, slipshod, illogical and perverted piece of declamation' (pp.76 f.). If one pauses, however, for a moment after St Just's opening assertion that he and his fellow-revolutionaries are no more cruel than Nature and Time, and if one slowly absorbs his description of the workings of nature and time, then one can perhaps begin to see beyond one's preconceived notions of St Just himself:

*Die Natur folgt ruhig und unwiderstehlich ihren Gesetzen, der Mensch wird vernichtet, wo er mit ihnen in Conflict kommt. Eine Veränderung in den Bestandtheilen der Luft, ein Auflodern des tellurischen Feuers, ein Schwanken in dem Gleichgewicht einer Wassermasse und eine Seuche, ein vulkanischer Ausbruch, eine Ueberschwemmung begraben Tausende. Was ist das Resultat? Eine unbedeutende, im großen Ganzen kaum bemerkbare Veränderung der physischen Natur, die fast spurlos vorübergegangen seyn würde, wenn nicht Leichen auf ihrem Wege lägen. (II.7.45)*

This is not the voice of a one-track-minded political fanatic; it is a lot more like the voice of the young scientist, Büchner, giving a serious and carefully stated description of what actually goes on and can be observed to go on in the natural world. He is talking about some of the long-term natural events in the earth and its atmosphere, invisible to the eye of the layman, and some of the contingent short-term violent eruptions which bring instant death to thousands, yet leave only infinitesimal changes in the earth's surface. These two parallel sets of natural events are rooted in scientific 'facts' under investigation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first three 'hidden' fluctuations of wide scope and long duration rest on what were then comparatively recent discoveries: that of the chemical composition of the air – changes in its long-term composition were still a matter of speculation; that of the variation in time of the internal temperature of the earth; that of areas of the world, the Paris Basin, for example, in the recent researches of Cuvier,<sup>1</sup> which had undergone several periods of complete submersion. The second three, of more local area and short duration, are familiar phenomena – epidemics, volcanic eruptions, floods – but subjects of controversy in the young scientific world: before germ theory, disease was thought, for instance, to be the result of pestilential or bad air, hence the connexion here between the change in the components of the air and epidemic outbreaks of disease; changes caused in the earth's surface by volcanic eruptions and by floods were a great bone of contention among geologists, who had divided into opposing camps of Vulcanists and Neptunists, according to whether they ascribed the formation of the earth's surface to volcanic action or to the action of water.<sup>2</sup> The changes in physical nature actually caused by any of these events were in themselves scarcely perceptible, 'fast spurlos' as Büchner says, except that they left a trail of corpses.

It is perhaps not unreasonable to think that Büchner might have had in mind here the traces left in the rocks by the corpses of previous species, the fossiliferous strata such as led Cuvier to his own conclusions about the successive floods of the Paris Basin. Certainly he uses this precise image later in the play when he gives Danton the words: 'Die Sündfluth der Revolution mag unsere Leichen absetzen wo sie will, mit unserm fossilen Knochen wird man noch immer allen Königen die Schädel einschlagen können' (IV.5.70). Translators perhaps miss the force of this image when they translate 'absetzen' as 'toss up',<sup>3</sup> 'cast up',<sup>4</sup> 'discharge',<sup>5</sup> since Büchner surely means exactly what he says: the Flood of the Revolution will 'deposit' our corpses, put them down in other words into the layers of the earth. This is only a tiny example of what readers do on a larger scale when they fail to realize that Büchner in the first paragraph of St Just's speech is very seriously describing a world with which he and his generation are struggling, often very painfully, to come to terms.

It is important to remember that the young Georg Büchner grew up surrounded by intimations of the great awakening insight of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into natural evolutionary processes. When he wrote *Dantons Tod*, he was, as a student of science, already leaning towards comparative anatomy, a science at that time working on the frontiers of evolutionary research. His father, moreover, acquired the issues of ongoing scientific works as they came off the press.<sup>6</sup> One does not have to look even as far afield as the theories of Cuvier and Lamarck, of Oken and Goethe; much nearer home in Darmstadt was J.J. Kaup, curator of the Duke's natural history collections, und undoubtedly known personally to the Büchner family; Kaup wrote a book in 1829 on the evolutionary history of European animals.<sup>7</sup> This and similar publications, essaying theories of biological and geological development, must have found their way into the Büchner household and been discussed there. Yet the evolving world was still a strange and unacceptable idea to many of their contemporaries. The theory that the world had been created six thousand years previously by God as a habitation for man died hard in the post-Enlightenment decades,<sup>8</sup> and that Büchner describes the new world so matter-of-factly here already marks him off from many of his fellows, and should be recognized as a major factor of his originality of thought in his day and age.

If then his description of this new world, one where nature is following its own laws, physical laws operating over a long period of time, where human beings are quite incidental to the whole process, is serious and carefully stated in the first paragraph of St Just's speech, why should one assume that his following social analogy, his description of what goes on in society, is any less serious and carefully stated? Certainly some caution is in order, and it is worth while calmly to examine again what the speaker says.

He is reflecting in the speech as a whole on nature and history, or perhaps more precisely on nature as history and history as nature. He is looking at social revolution and in particular the French Revolution in the context of a slowly evolving world, and asking himself a series of difficult questions:

Ich frage nun: soll die moralische Natur in ihren Revolutionen mehr Rücksicht nehmen, als die physische? Soll eine Idee nicht eben so gut wie ein Gesetz der Physik vernichten dürfen, was sich ihr widersetzt? Soll überhaupt ein Ereigniß, was die ganze Gestaltung der moralischen Natur d.h. der Menschheit umändert, nicht durch Blut gehen dürfen? Der Weltgeist bedient sich in der geistigen Sphäre unserer Arme eben so, wie er in der physischen Vulkane oder Wasserfluthen gebraucht. Was liegt daran ob sie an einer Seuche oder an der Revolution sterben? – (II.7.45)

He then proceeds in the next paragraph to observe what seems to go on in the history of mankind, and to ask entirely logical questions which arise from his observations: mankind develops slowly; one can count its steps in centuries marked by the graves of generations; in the process of arriving at the simplest inventions and principles, millions of people live and die. Is it not obvious that when history suddenly moves faster, more people lose their breath? He chooses the obvious specific instance, stating in simple terms the principle underlying the French Revolution; all men were created under similar circumstances, they are all equal, except for the differences which nature herself has made between them. Therefore everyone has rights, and no one has privileges, neither individuals nor greater or smaller classes of individuals. Every term of this sentence has been turned into reality and in the process killed its share of people. 14 July (the Fall of the Bastille), 10 August (the capture of the Tuileries and the interning of the King and royal family), 31 May (the expulsion of the Girondists from the Convention), such turning-points in the course of revolutionary events are the punctuation-marks in the statement of principle. The principle was turned into practice in four years, a process which would normally have taken a century and been marked by the deaths of generations. Is it so surprising that the torrent of the Revolution, thus speeding up history, should expel its own corpses as it comes to each new bend?

The speaker, then, has contemplated in these three paragraphs the way society develops, appearing to be changed slowly by ideas as the natural world is changed slowly by laws of physics; sometimes these ideas cause rapid and violent changes, as also do physical laws. This is not a popular idea, and most critics do not like it. They do not like it for a very good reason: men are after all not only the victims of social eruptions as they are of physical eruptions; they are also, or appear to be, the agents. There is a ruthlessness in the cool acceptance of the social analogy, notably when it is drawn by a man like St Just who calmly regards himself as an agent, and goes on to urge the killing of more people in the name of the idea in question. It is this which causes critics to hear the whole speech as the hollow rhetoric of a doctrinaire fanatic. If one absorbs and understands the empirical truth of the first paragraph, however, one realizes that quite a different reading of the next three paragraphs is possible.

The social analogy does not necessarily sound like the 'straightforward imagery of a fanatic' (See Jacobs, p. xvii). Instead it can sound like the deadly serious self-questioning of a man who looks with admiration and horror at the working out of

nature's laws, who knows that the physical world at large and the physical world in all its small particularities change inexorably through time, that man is himself a changing entity and often a victim of other changing entities; knowing this, he is forced to ask himself the difficult question of whether the evolution of society's forms may not be as inexorable and uncontrollable as that of physical forms; if ideas change societies, sometimes slowly over generations, sometimes rapidly and violently, then what does that make of man, the apparent agent in these changes? Is he then a tool in the hands of a driving world force, just as volcanoes and floods are such a tool? St Just, in postulating such a force, uses the word 'Weltgeist', and the critics who are assuming a cynical abdication of personal responsibility on his part, tend to regard the word as a Büchnerian parody on Hegelian or Fichtean terminology;<sup>9</sup> we must not forget, however, that such terms were also used by the 'Naturphilosophen', whose work was taken seriously enough by Büchner for him to incorporate certain of their ideas into his scientific writings. They also entertained ideas of a driving natural force behind the development of the universe, and looked for parallels between the laws of the spirit and the laws of nature.<sup>10</sup> The vocabulary and thought-patterns of the 'Naturphilosophen' cannot be ignored in assessing Büchner's view of nature as expressed in his science. Equally it should be weighed in the balance when it crops up in his plays.

St Just's speech as a whole cries out for an interpretation in the overall context of Büchner's scientific thinking, but it is frequently discussed without reference to that context, and omitted entirely from discussions of the scientific thinking itself.<sup>11</sup> This is partly because, even though it contains a quite literal description of what goes on in the physical world, it occurs in a 'literary' work, and so is separated off automatically by many people from the 'scientific' work of Büchner. Furthermore, it is spoken, in its literary context, by a controversial and rather unpopular character, and the controversy surrounding St Just is a political, not a scientific one. On top of all this, some critics who have sincerely tried to reconcile the differences as they see them between Büchner's science and his literature, have come to the conclusion that his view of nature was a consoling and heartening one, a counterbalance to his dismal view of man and society. This presumably makes it difficult for them to accept St Just's view of nature as Büchner's own. Hans Mayer, for example, calls his chapter on Büchner's science 'Harmonische Natur' and writes, 'In der Gesellschaft sieht Büchner nur den Einzelmenschen und seinen Schmerz, nur Chaos und Unordnung . . . in der Natur aber spürt er Ordnung, Plan und Harmonie' (p.372). A.H.J. Knight writes in similar vein: '[His] belief in the noble simplicity and purposiveness of the world of Nature, as opposed to the chaotic hopelessness of the world of men, became his only consolation in face of the difficulties and disappointments of life' (p. 158). For the reader coming straight from the St Just speech, with its apparently non-purposive changes in nature and its thousands of incidental corpses, these remarks seem rather strange. They arise, however, from these authors' entirely laudable attempts to read and



interpret the general statements which Büchner makes in his scientific writings.<sup>12</sup> These statements are, somewhat bewilderingly, optimistic in tone, rather poetic and even Romantic – bewildering, that is, to the reader of his literary works who does not expect this from him. Walter Müller-Seidel is one of the few critics who does deal with St Just's speech in the context of Büchner's scientific view of nature; he states categorically that 'das Bild der Natur in den Dichtungen Büchners ist das Bild einer illusionslos gesehenen Natur', and in interpreting this as the keynote of Büchner's attitude to nature, dismisses the general statements in the scientific writings as the fading echoes of the vocabulary and ideas of an earlier generation.<sup>13</sup> It seems to me, however, that they are better viewed as an integral part of Büchner's whole 'Bild der Natur'. This is not the place to discuss his scientific work in detail, but some discussion of what he meant by his much quoted generalizations on Nature might help to clarify his thinking about man, nature, and society in general and particularly in St Just's speech.

## 2. *Büchner's Scientific View of Nature*

The closing sentence of Büchner's thesis on the nervous system of the barbel fish is one which, together with similar statements in his Zürich lecture,<sup>14</sup> has given rise to such ideas as Mayer's and Knight's of his sense of order, plan, and harmony in nature. These general ideas are widespread in Büchner criticism, and it is worth while therefore to concentrate some attention on this specific sentence:

La nature est grande et riche, non parce qu'à chaque instant elle crée arbitrairement des organes nouveaux pour de nouvelles fonctions; mais parce qu'elle produit, d'après le plan le plus simple, les formes les plus élevées et les plus pures.<sup>15</sup>

This is a personification of nature as wide open to interpretation as any occurring in a literary work. One cannot assume that the author believes literally in a living, planning entity, but equally one cannot assume that he does not. Personified nature figured in the scientific writing of Büchner's day as frequently as in the poetry, and a whole range of interpretation is possible; it could be a mere linguistic convenience, a useful shorthand for talking about natural phenomena, as in the case of Magendie, for example, who used it often, despite his own strictures against the use by physiologists of imprecise and metaphysical terms;<sup>16</sup> at the other end of the spectrum, there were the more speculative writers – Goethe and Oken, Schelling and various German scientists who were also 'Naturphilosophen'<sup>17</sup> – for whom Nature was in varying degrees a creative active force. Even among the latter one has to define the word each time in the context of each individual's work. Büchner's primary focus in his science is on his experimental work, but his few speculative comments do recall some of the vocabulary of the 'Naturphilosophen'; there are so few of them that it is hard to be dogmatic, on the basis of them alone, about just how consciously creative his 'Nature' was supposed to be.

Certainly one should not indulge in large and expansive comments on his consoling visions of 'order, plan and harmony' in the natural world based on this

kind of reference to Nature's 'simple plan'. One should rather ask the question: what specifically is he talking about? His 'new organs' are organs of the body; that is what his whole thesis has been about; he has performed intricate and detailed dissections on a particular fish, using other animals for comparison. The narrow focus of his interest was in the relation of the spinal nerves with the cranial nerves. The wider context of this work was the idea that all anatomical structures were variations of 'original' spinal vertebrae. Büchner chose to work on the fish, the lowest class of vertebrates, explicitly because it was less complex than the higher vertebrates (II,65), but his larger interest was the overriding one of contemporary anatomists, namely, how did specific organs develop and relate to one another, and how did specific species develop and relate to one another?

Oken, at whose instigation Büchner was invited to his position at the University of Zürich, had already established to his own satisfaction as early as 1805 that no organism was 'created' that was not microscopic; man therefore was not created, but developed.<sup>18</sup> No satisfactorily complete theory of evolution had yet been devised to replace former beliefs in 'creation', but many scientists, from contemporary giants like Cuvier and Lamarck to various local 'naturalists' such as J.J.Kaup, were looking for one. There was a widespread desire, particularly among the 'Naturphilosophen' but by no means exclusively among them, to find a simple 'law', a 'guiding principle', a 'plan', which would explain in an intellectually and aesthetically satisfying way all the mounting evidence of the evolving processes of nature – Schelling's 'Bauplan', for example, or Goethe's 'archetype' theory and his ideas of an 'Urpflanze' on which infinite varieties were based. It is against this background that we must see Büchner's 'simple plan'; the 'pure and elevated' forms are variations on a plan or design, forms through which physical organs have developed in time from simple to complex, every one technically perfect in its own way and for its own sake. Büchner makes it quite clear, even in the one sentence under discussion, that he was not in agreement with those anatomical teleologists who saw organs as developing in order to perform certain functions.<sup>19</sup>

What Büchner, the experimental anatomist, is doing in making this, his closing remark in his scientific thesis, is setting his specific morphological discoveries in an explanatory framework, a framework with aesthetic properties, such as conceptual simplicity, order, and non-functional beauty. He is not postulating a generally optimistic view of 'order, plan and harmony' in the universe at large, nor is his view of the 'simple plan' of nature, as expressed here, describing a separate world from that of the pain, misery and chaos in the life of the individual and of human society. The latter are simply not under discussion in this one sentence. In his later lecture on the nerves of the skull, he explicitly suggests that the life of the individual is largely irrelevant to the development of physical forms: 'Und so wird . . . das ganze körperliche Dasein des Individuums nicht zu seiner eigenen Erhaltung aufgebracht, sondern es wird die Manifestation eines Urgesetzes, eines Gesetzes der Schönheit, das nach den einfachsten Rissen und Linien die höchsten und reinsten

Formen hervorbringt' (II, 292). There is no reason at all to believe that such a conception of Nature brought him peace of mind. It is much more likely to have raised in his mind a whole series of disturbing and unanswerable questions about man and society. As soon as one takes his literary work seriously as proceeding from that same scientific mind, then one encounters these questions everywhere in it.

St Just's speech does not belong in a different thought-framework from Büchner's later researches in comparative anatomy. Its vision of nature is simply broader, looking beyond the non-purposive development of physical organs to the equally non-purposive physical and chemical changes in the earth's substance. In neither one nor the other are we dealing with a fully worked-out view of 'life' and what it means. That the concept of non-purposiveness itself raises more questions than it answers, Büchner freely admitted in his Zürich lecture. For the anatomical teleologist who explained that the tear-duct developed in order to moisten the eye, the hand developed in order to grasp, a question had been answered. For the philosophical anatomist, who said rather that man grasped because he had a hand, the question was only beginning: 'Wo die teleologische Schule mit ihrer Antwort fertig ist, fängt die Frage für die philosophische an' (II,292). Büchner goes on to postulate his 'Urgesetz der Schönheit' as a way of describing the development of physical organs.

That the operation of a 'basic law of beauty' will seem to most of us not very far away from a deliberately and purposefully designed plan is not a new problem, and many nineteenth-century thinkers found themselves tied in knots by it. Scientists and others who accepted the idea of nature following, in the words of St Just, calmly and irresistibly its own laws, still asked the question: who then is the lawgiver, and seeing the kind of carnage involved in nature's processes, what kind of a lawgiver devises such laws (cf. Greene, p. 303)? Very few thinkers in Büchner's day and later saw the problem with the clarity of Nietzsche who wrote in his *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*: 'Hüten wir uns zu sagen, daß es Gesetze in der Natur gebe. Es giebt nur Nothwendigkeiten: da ist Keiner, der befiehlt, Keiner, der gehorcht, Keiner, der übertritt. Wenn ihr wißt, daß es keine Zwecke gibt, so wißt ihr auch, daß es keinen Zufall gibt: denn nur neben einer Welt von Zwecken hat das Wort "Zufall" einen Sinn.'<sup>20</sup> Darwin himself wrote very honestly on the subject, declaring himself to be bewildered. He did not wish to write, he said, 'atheistically', but he could not see as plainly as others evidence of design and beneficence on all sides. He could not persuade himself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the bodies of caterpillars, or that, by the same design, a cat would play with mice. Nevertheless, looking at the wonderful universe and especially at the nature of man, he was reluctant to conclude that everything was the result of brute force. His solution in this instance was one at which Nietzsche would surely have scoffed: 'I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the

details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance.<sup>21</sup> One can well imagine, on the basis of this, that Darwin too would have found it difficult to create coherently convincing dramatic characters. He, of course, was no more a philosopher than the young Georg Büchner. Many people have been confused into thinking Darwin's theory of natural selection to be a teleological one. Hans Mayer, for example, states this in no uncertain terms in his chapter on Büchner's science.<sup>22</sup> He was not a teleologist, though his language often implied it. Collingwood put the point clearly when he said that Darwin never for a moment thought of nature as a conscious agent deliberately trying experiments and aware of the ends she was pursuing:

If he had troubled to think out the philosophy underlying his biology, he would have arrived at something like Schopenhauer's conception of the evolutionary process as the expression of a blind will, a creative and directive force utterly devoid of consciousness and of the moral attributes which consciousness bestows on the will of man; and it is some such ideas which we find floating everywhere in the atmosphere of Darwin's contemporaries, such as Tennyson.<sup>23</sup>

It is 'some such ideas', I would submit, that we find floating everywhere in *Dantons Tod*, and they are the product of Büchner's scientific thinking quite as much as of his philosophic or literary studies. They are not very clearly worked out, but St Just is groping around and trying to come to terms with them in his speech: 'Der Weltgeist bedient sich in der geistigen Sphäre unserer Arme eben so, wie er in der physischen Vulkane oder Wasserfluthen gebraucht' (II.7.45). Büchner, sensing some force driving nature to obey its laws, and, as a young man with a social conscience, extremely involved in projects of his own to change society, is very seriously disturbed by the question of whether the individual human being, to him so clearly one manifestation of nature's processes, is not also driven by unseen forces. St Just's version of this idea is no more 'bloodthirsty' in effect than Danton's version, 'Die Schwerter, mit denen Geister kämpfen, man sieht nur die Hände nicht, wie im Märchen' (II.5.41), or even Robespierre's 'Die Sünde ist im Gedanken. Ob der Gedanke That wird, ob ihn der Körper nachspielt, das ist Zufall' (I.6.29).

One can see the problem going around and around in Büchner's head<sup>24</sup> as he contemplates these men of violent action. He takes the historical Danton, some scenes after his scene of remorse, and puts him before the Revolutionary Tribunal, enumerating, as he did in reality, his great deeds for the Revolution in thunderous tones, and gives him an unhistorical, especially bloodthirsty boast: 'Ich habe im September die junge Brut der Revolution mit den zerstückten Leibern der Aristocraten geätzt' (III.4.54). Arrogant and gigantic, the historical Danton proclaims to his audience, 'Männer meines Schlages sind in Revolutionen unschätzbar, auf ihrer Stirne schwebt das Genie der Freiheit' (III.4.53), and shortly afterwards Büchner's Danton slips in the unlikely disclaimer, 'Ich bin nicht stolz darauf. Das Schicksal führt uns den Arm, aber nur gewaltige Naturen sind seine Organe', a strangely perverted version of the 'muß' speech: there he tempered his remorse, by laying on

some unknown force the responsibility for his crimes; here he tempers his pride by giving fate the main credit for them, while somehow preserving some credit for his own 'gewaltige Natur'. One cannot help thinking that Büchner, no less than Darwin, is still bewildered.

St. Just's speech is his most concerted and coherent attempt in *Dantons Tod* to explain the phenomenon of revolution in the historical process, and to account for the flowing blood which so revolted him in his own studies of the French Revolution. It is a much better worked-out and more convincing rationale for social revolution than Danton's rather lame allusion to the unseen powers and the fates which he suggests are controlling his own revolutionary career. Few seem tempted, however, to call Danton a bloodthirsty fanatic, not even in his speeches to the Revolutionary Tribunal. This is probably mainly for the simple reason that Danton is the obvious underdog and is fighting for his life. If *he* had expounded the content of the first four paragraphs of St Just's speech in defence of his career, people might have listened to it. Because St Just expounds it, to advocate the shedding of more blood, on the whole they seem not to listen to it. The picture of St Just himself, as one might say, fills the screen. Viëtor describes him, for example, as a coldly ambitious, doctrinaire fanatic, and then goes on to say: 'Büchner hat die Essenz dieser Person hineingepreßt in einen einzigen Auftritt: in die große Rede, die er im Konvent hält' (Viëtor (1949), p. 142). He, with most other critics, is in my opinion much overstating the extent to which Büchner has really thought out the essence of St Just's personality. He is, I would say, much less interested in the character of St Just, at this point in the play, than he is in the content of the speech. In this, he as the writer seems passionately involved, but he has attached it, rather carelessly, to the person of St Just.

This becomes clearer if one pursues the character of St Just, and looks for reverberations of his speech in the rest of the play. The only repercussions in his presence are the mocking echoes of his imagery on the lips of his own cohorts: Barrère's 'Geh St. Just und spinne deine Perioden, worin jedes Komma ein Säbelhieb und jeder Punkt ein abgeschlagener Kopf ist' (III.6.58), or Collot's 'Geh St. Just. Die Lava der Revolution fließt . . . Geh St. Just, wir werden dir helfen den Donnerkeil auf die Häupter der Feiglinge zu schleudern' (III.6.58 f.). But where does one find a just confrontation of that imagery, a serious and heartfelt refutation of that powerful and deadly argument? — from a man in gaol who has not heard the speech, addressed to two other men who have not heard it, the newly arrived prisoners, Danton and Lacroix. It is the prisoner Mercier who seriously takes up the image of the volcano and turns it with all the emotional strength of personal pain, not against St Just, but the Dantonists:

Nicht wahr, Lacroix? Die Gleichheit schwingt ihre Sichel über allen Häuptern, die Lava der Revolution fließt, die Guillotine republicanisirt! Da klatschen die Gallerien und die Römer reiben sich die Hände, aber sie hören nicht, daß jedes dießer Worte das Röcheln eines Opfers ist. Geht einmal euren Phrasen nach, bis

zu dem Punkt wo sie verkörpert werden. Blickt um euch, das Alles habt ihr gesprochen, es ist eine mimische Uebersetzung eurer Worte. Dieße Elenden, ihre Henker und die Guillotine sind eure lebendig gewordenen Reden. Ihr bautet eure Systeme, wie Bajazet seine Pyramiden, aus Menschenköpfen. (III.3.51 f.)

Here is the small individual voice raised against the crushingly logical argument of St Just for the inevitability of violence and death in times of rapid change. The rhetoric of the global view is all very well from the global viewpoint, but stand now in the place of the victim, and the global view fades. This Mercier is one of the victims of that rapid march of the idea of equality called the French Revolution. He is one of a number of victims whom we meet in the gaols of the second half of *Dantons Tod*; the historical process described by St Just rolls on through the gaols to the guillotine, and we can expect the viewpoint to shift. It does, but the shift is by no means clear-cut and unambiguous. There is a transition-point of a kind where the Dantonists themselves cease to be agents in the revolutionary process, and become instead victims, and this transition-point calls for a closer look.

CHAPTER V  
QUESTIONS OF COHERENCE  
IN MOTIVATION AND CHARACTERIZATION

1. *The Complications of History*

When the cry of personal pain and suffering, countering the cool analysis of St Just with his own imagery, is addressed by Mercier in gaol to the newly arrived Dantonists, one sees at a glance that the leading revolutionaries of Büchner's play have more in common with each other than they do with the faceless victims of processes in which they have played a major part. No critic has argued that Mercier's words were applicable to the Robespierrists and not to the Dantonists, to the revolutionaries and not to the counter-revolutionaries, not even such critics as regard the play as a political confrontation between plebeian revolutionaries and bourgeois counter-revolutionaries. Mercier's words can as well be addressed to Danton or to Lacroix or to St Just or to Robespierre – or indeed to anyone whose rhetoric has ever been translated into human corpses. The fact that the rhetoric is not by any means necessarily hollow, but often expresses passionately held principles, does not make a lot of difference to the corpses, and it does not affect one whit the validity of Mercier's argument which from the personal point of view is a strong one, and rings true.

The confrontation here, however, is specifically between Mercier and the Dantonists. It is invented by Büchner but has a historical base in that Mercier was a Girondist with no love of Danton, as Büchner, who had read at least some of his *Nouveau Paris*, knew;<sup>1</sup> he had called Danton in his introduction to that book 'le mauvais génie de la France' (p. XV), a line which Büchner adapts for him here (III.1.49), and his bitterness at the execution of the twenty-two Girondists, for which he here holds Danton responsible, is clearly reflected in the line 'Das Blut der zwei und zwanzig<sup>2</sup> ersäuft dich' (III.1.50). This is so little recognized as an actual confrontation between characters of different politics, however, that one scarcely notices when a critic, for instance, loosely describes the prisoners of the gaol scene as 'Dantonists' (see Mayer, p.344), a group that includes Thomas Payne, Chaumette,<sup>3</sup> and Mercier himself. This is a small instance of the way in which we, without even realizing it, do not take the characters of *Dantons Tod* seriously as political opponents of each other, even when Büchner endows them with authentic little historical phrases to identify which side they are on. It is not surprising. The

confrontation between Mercier and the Dantonists is quite real and specific; as characters they stand for a moment on opposite sides of a political struggle as well as of the historical process, but they do so only for a moment. At this moment, Büchner might have chosen to develop the play quite differently, to show a real clash of ideas between the Dantonists and those men whom they and their colleagues have put in gaol.

As far as the actual prisoners in the gaols of Paris were concerned, the arrival in their midst of such notable revolutionaries as Danton, Desmoulins, Lacroix, etc. was the occasion of not a little *Schadenfreude*. Honoré Riouffe, himself a great admirer of the Girondists, was as a prisoner witness to the arrival in the Conciergerie and the departure from it to the guillotine of many notable men, the twenty-two Girondists, Hébert, Danton, and finally Robespierre himself. He saw from his miserable standpoint little distinction between Danton and Robespierre: Robespierre, 'un fou sanguinaire', and Danton, while possessed of some human sentiments, 'un des fléaux de l'humanité' (p. 71). Right or wrong as verdicts on these men as historical figures, one can see that from the perspective of the filthy, disease-ridden Paris gaols, the assessment made sense. From Riouffe's point of view, any efforts the Dantonists had made to urge mercy and moderation were altogether too little and too late, though he does grant to Camille Desmoulins some credit for recent issues of *Le Vieux Cordelier* which had brought a glimmer of hope to the prisoners (p. 65). Büchner catches something of all this briefly in the taunting reactions of the prisoners as Danton and the rest arrive in gaol, including their slightly gentler reception of Camille: 'Laßt ihn! Das sind die Lippen, welche das Wort Erbarmen gesprochen' (III.1.50).

This glimpse of the mighty laid low is, however, condensed by Büchner into two short sequences, one in the Luxemburg (III.1.49 f.), and one in the Conciergerie (III.3.51 f.) These two sequences, with the exception of most of Mercier's speech quoted above (pp. 68 f.), are made up of sentences and scraps of sentences taken from the sources, a number of them from Riouffe as well as from similar passages in Thiers. Riouffe in his memoirs dwells with considerable scorn on the Dantonists' sojourn in gaol – their shame at having been betrayed 'par leur partie' and finding themselves in the midst of their victims, as well as the complete absence in their manner and conversation of 'sollicitude pour la patrie'; they died, according to him, trying to unravel the web of intrigue which had led to their downfall (pp. 68 f.). Riouffe regards their few expressions of remorse with total scepticism. Of Lacroix's amazement at the terrible conditions of the gaol, which Büchner records in the play,<sup>4</sup> Riouffe says bitterly, 'Si son ignorance n'eût pas été feinte, elle n'en eût pas été moins odieuse. Génies destructeurs qui lancent les fléaux parmi les hommes, et ne daignent pas s'informer de leurs progrès!' (p. 69). This is indeed the kind of bitterness which Büchner catches at this point in the dialogue with Mercier's much more eloquent speech, 'Nicht wahr, Lacroix? Die Gleichheit schwingt ihre Sichel . . .', the opening for a real confrontation such as Riouffe would have under-



stood. But he closes it again at once with Danton's expression of remorse at having created the Revolutionary Tribunal: 'Es ist jetzt ein Jahr, daß ich das Revolutions-tribunal schuf. Ich bitte Gott und Menschen dafür um Verzeihung, ich wollte neuen Septembermorden zuvorkommen . . . Meine Herren, ich hoffte Sie Alle dießen Ort verlassen zu machen' (III.3.52). This is a remark which is quoted, more or less in these words, by Riouffe, who claims to have heard Danton say them.<sup>5</sup> It lacks, however, in Büchner's text the straight perspective of Riouffe's sardonic comment: 'Étrange langage dans la bouche de Danton'.<sup>6</sup> Büchner gives Mercier the much milder rejoinder, 'Oh, herausgehen werden wir', and instead of drawing on the hostile Riouffe, he ends his scene with the meek words attributed to Danton by the historian Mignet, 'Ich bin jetzt bey Ihnen, der Himmel weiß wie das enden soll'.<sup>7</sup>

Despite then the eloquence of the victim which flares for a moment in Mercier's speech, there is in Büchner's scene no straightforward accusation by Mercier or anyone else of hypocrisy or bad faith on the part of the Dantonists. Once again it is clear that Büchner is simply not interested in working out a real clash of ideas and personalities through his characters. The promising confrontation between the Dantonists and the men in gaol is sketched in rapidly and then dropped, and the resulting confusion about the character of Danton at this point in the play is never resolved.

What after all is one supposed to think when Danton's pious appeal for forgiveness, his intention of preventing new September massacres, is immediately followed by a complete about-face before the Revolutionary Tribunal where he boasts in bloodthirsty terms, given to him especially for the occasion by Büchner, of the September massacres themselves? A Danton who genuinely felt remorse could have made a very different speech before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Ah but, one might answer, Büchner was bound by his historical sources. Most of the boasting language of Danton before the Tribunal derives from the words of the real Danton as reported by Thiers. And the real Danton also expressed remorse in gaol within the hearing of Riouffe. 'Reality' therefore justifies the contradiction involved.

The problem is that there is no reality in the sources. There is Riouffe's view of what went on at the time, Mercier's retrospective view of what seemed to go on, Strahlheim's compilation of numerous personal views in *Unsere Zeit*, Thiers's and Mignet's somewhat differing syntheses after the fact . . . and so on. These writers did not have the same attitude to the men involved in the Revolution. For Riouffe, to whom Danton's remorse was sheer hypocrisy, Danton's about-face before the Tribunal would raise no problems of interpretation. That, he would surely say, is the real Danton; the words of Danton's self-defence would in no way strike him as strange language in the mouth of Danton. There is none of the biassed clarity of this viewpoint in Büchner's presentation; he has already given us in a scene of his own imagining a genuinely remorseful Danton. He knows Riouffe's Danton and gives us an inkling of what Danton is for such an observer, but he also knows the

Danton of his other sources, of Thiers, for example, from whose account he largely takes the defence before the Tribunal – Thiers who is seeing a giant of the Revolution defending himself magnificently in a last stand against the dictator Robespierre, and going to his death with pride and courage: 'Il expira fier de lui-même, et croyant ses fautes et sa vie assez couvertes par ses grands services et ses derniers projets.'<sup>8</sup> He is also familiar with the 'great men' of the Revolution as they appeared to Mercier after it was all over: 'On eût dit que cette révolution étoit l'ouvrage de quelqu'homme d'un génie extraordinaire, d'une tête vaste à physionomie antique, enfin de quelqu'esprit au-delà des limites ordinaires: point du tout. Nous avons été tous ce que Marivaux, qui en étoit, appelloit les grands médiocres' (Vol. I, p. 56). Mercier himself uses the image of the volcano to illustrate his assertion that it is impossible to determine the causes of the political phenomenon of the revolution: 'Ce grand volcan auroit pu dormir encore longtemps, il s'est embrasé, il s'est éteint, il s'est rallumé' (Vol. I, p. 15). And talking of writers and publicists of the day who wanted to make the lava flow this way or that, he says the lava simply swept them away along with everyone else.

All these historically possible but personally self-contradictory Dantons – the hypocritical villain, the genuinely remorseful hero, the legitimately proud great man, the mediocrity in the grip of forces larger than himself – jostle with each other in these three 'historical' scenes (III. 1, 3, 4) of the Dantonists' arrival in gaol and Danton's appearance before the Tribunal. There is no way of judging absolutely which of them Büchner intends to be the 'real' Danton in the play as a whole. It is equally difficult to judge which in 'reality' was the real Danton; historians have reached no consensus on this in almost two hundred years, their opinions changing with the changing times and changing orthodoxies.<sup>9</sup> But from the point of view of creating a plausible literary character, some combinations of these four possible figures are more convincing than others. In *Dantons Tod* no coherent combination is ever worked out. Like all other thorny questions of character interpretation, it is quickly dropped. After the brief confrontation with Mercier, Büchner's Dantonists merge with the other 'victims' in the play. Facing the guillotine themselves, they are now victims, and Büchner seems much more interested in this as a general state than as a specific instance of political victimization.

The scenes of Danton and his friends in gaol are, it is true, juxtaposed in Acts III and IV with scenes of Robespierre's 'Ungeheuer' talking callously of the horrors being perpetrated in the gaols and conniving among themselves to bring the Dantonists to the scaffold by fair means or foul; and under these circumstances, as we have already observed, the Dantonists must inevitably call forth the sympathy of the audience and so seem to enjoy the sympathy of the author. It would be absurd to suggest that they do not enjoy the sympathy of the author; his dwelling for the greater part of two acts on the agonized preoccupations of men in gaol facing death clearly implies considerable emotional involvement with their plight. They *are* the 'Elende', the 'lebendig gewordene Reden' of Mercier's speech, but the

fact is that after Mercier's speech, there is very little expressed evidence of actual anger among any of the victims against their actual oppressors. Danton in his last speech before the Tribunal once straightforwardly accuses these oppressors: 'Ich klage Robespierre, St Just und ihre Henker des Hochverraths an' (III.9.63), but the Dantonists in their cells, far from wrangling over the intricacies of their downfall, as Riouffe says they did, make very few allusions to the political circumstances which have brought them to this pass. Such allusions as there are, occur in Act IV, Scene 5, and are, by and large, fragments of Danton's own last recorded sayings, taken straight from the sources and distributed here among the Dantonists, where at this point in the play they sometimes seem slightly out of character: Danton's historical comment, for example, 'Ich lasse alles in einer schrecklichen Verwirrung. Keiner versteht das Regieren' (IV.5.69),<sup>10</sup> sounds a little strange from Büchner's Danton who has never evinced the slightest interest in 'das Regieren' and seems singularly unfit for it. The comment which Riouffe cites as Danton's, that nothing proved Robespierre to be a Nero as much as his friendliness to Camille in the days before Camille's arrest,<sup>11</sup> Büchner gives to Lacroix, and pinpoints its irrelevance himself by giving Camille the reply: 'Meinetwegen, was geht mich das an?'. The fact that the Dantonists are being sent to the guillotine by Robespierre seems by that point indeed to be an irrelevance.

So, by extension, is it also irrelevant to deduce from the author's obvious emotional involvement with their plight an approval of their role as counter-revolutionaries in the politics of the day. To try to argue out even whether his sympathies lie more generally with the agents or with the victims of violent social change would seem to be an equal waste of critical time and energy. We have already seen in Acts I and II his strong emotional involvement with the problems of the agent — extent of responsibility, purity of motivation, remorse for crimes committed — these questions dominate the introspective scenes of the first half of the play, and crop up at moments in the second half, as in the glimpse of a self-questioning Barrère. The climactic point of this kind of discussion is the speech of St Just; the weight of the introspection of the second half of the play shifts to the mind of the victim, the man who is not only putatively less than responsible for his deeds, but who has literally no power over what happens to him.

Danton is himself agent turned victim. The specific political ironies of this in its context are apparently of little interest to Büchner. He does not at any rate explore them. He seems rather to be interested in the whole complex of problems arising from the empirical evidence of history that, as societies change, both agents and victims are involved in that change. Some people seem to be responsible and some people seem to be victimized. Perhaps everyone is in a larger sense caught in some kind of massive trap, conditioned in various ways to do what they do; this is the kind of vague speculation in which he indulges — not, to be sure, in any frivolous sense. The emotional strength of *Dantons Tod* rests not least in Büchner's own deadly serious wrestling with such speculations, but in no way does he present us in

the play with final statements on the subject. Critics who want to suggest that *Dantons Tod* straightforwardly expresses Büchner's disillusionment with political revolution are over-simplifying the case as much as those who refuse to see the signs of political disillusionment in it. 'Of course', writes J P Stern, for whom the problem of pain and suffering is paramount in *Dantons Tod*, 'all political action in the play is eventually shown up as predetermined and meaningless' (Stern (1971), p.40). It does not seem to me to be so simple. 'Eventually' the Dantonists go to the guillotine. Apart from that, I see little eventual resolution of anything, as little in philosophical as in political matters.

The 'philosophy' of the play is usually discussed in terms of Danton's philosophy or, in so far as the two are differentiated, the philosophy of the men in gaol, and whole sections of this are frequently accepted without question as Büchner's own thoughts. It is quite common for the utterances of Danton or Thomas Payne to be discussed as Büchner's philosophy, and quite rare for the observations of St Just to be discussed as such, or even as 'philosophy' at all. St Just is held to be an active revolutionary, a politician, discussing therefore revolution and politics; the prisoners have ceased to be active revolutionaries, and are discussing other things – life, death, God, nothingness. Such an approach seems to me to miss the point of what St Just is saying, as well as the point of what the prisoners are saying, to miss, in short, the point of what Büchner is doing in *Dantons Tod*, namely, carrying on a passionate dialogue with himself on a set of completely intertwined problems. He does it through characters who are sometimes convincing mouthpieces, sometimes not. In the first scene in the Luxemburg, his lack of interest in the characters is more than usually blatant, but his involvement with the ideas expressed is manifest in the power of the language they use, as manifest as in St Just's powerful preceding speech. One has only to look a little more closely at the 'philosophy' of these particular victims to see that their pre-occupations have something in common with those of the agents of that process who held the stage in Acts I and II.

## 2. *The Complications of Religion*

Act III opens upon a group of prisoners, new characters to the audience, with the exception of Hérault de Séchelles who participates little in their conversation. They are detained in the Luxemburg, and they are discussing not politics but God. Since they – Payne, Chaumette, Mercier<sup>1 2</sup> – establish no personality in the rest of the play, and have apparently for most people no immediately obvious historical profile, the conversation is saved from the kind of response which greets St Just's speech: that is, one's interpretation of the discussion is not coloured by one's political or emotional attitudes to the characters themselves. This presents, however, a different problem. Since they have no 'character', their discussion seems abstracted, a 'strange interlude' dealing with the 'problem of God', as Hans Mayer has called it;<sup>1 3</sup> he explains it in simple terms: 'Thomas Paine führt das Wort:

Georg Büchner sagt ihm die Sätze und Gedanken ein, denn die Gefängnisphilosophie des geschichtlichen Paine war völlig anderer Art. Georg Büchner nimmt ganz unverhüllt Stellung. Nothwendigkeiten der Dramaturgie gab es nicht, um diese statische Einlage zu erklären' (p. 345). This explanation becomes much less obviously acceptable in isolation when one ponders the fact that the 'philosophy' of a number of Büchner's characters is significantly different from that of their historical counterparts. It would be hard to explain their scenes too ( and in fact many scenes in *Dantons Tod*) in terms of 'exigencies of dramaturgy'. There is no more or less reason on such grounds to suggest that Büchner is stating, for instance, his own position on history through St Just, or his own position on sex through Marion. We all know, of course, that Büchner has rehearsed some of the arguments of this scene elsewhere, namely in his notes on Spinoza (II, 236-40), and this is a perfectly good reason for suggesting that these were ideas which Büchner himself entertained. There is no good reason for regarding the scene as an interlude, still less as a strange interlude in the play; it seems so if one sees it as an isolated discussion on the existence of God, an issue separate from the issues of the rest of the play, to be discussed, as Mayer discusses it, in a separate chapter on Büchner's atheism.

It is up to a point an 'academic' discussion, and is phrased, particularly at the outset, in such standard terms of scholastic argument by definition as to give the impression of parody, almost of 'comic relief' (see Jacobs, p. xviii). The whole discussion is almost as much a refutation, a mockery of argument by definition, as it is a refutation of the existence of God. It reflects very strongly the frustration of the young Büchner, making his notes on Spinoza's formal proof of the existence of God, and protesting in a series of irritable questions:

Was zwingt uns aber ein Wesen zu denken, was nicht anders als seyend gedacht werden kann? ... Was berechtigt uns ... aus dießem Wesen das absolut Vollkommne, Gott, zu machen? Wenn man auf die Definition von Gott eingeht, so muß man auch das Daseyn Gottes zugeben. Was berechtigt uns aber, dieße Definition zu machen? (II,236)

Was das Vollkommne anbelangt, so können wir wieder fragen, was zwingt uns denn etwas Vollkommnes zu denken? (II,239)

This is in part the irritation of the layman; Büchner's interest in formal philosophy is well documented, but so is his impatience with the language which, after all, makes it what it is. He wrote in a letter of December 1833: 'Ich werfe mich mit aller Gewalt in die Philosophie, die Kunstsprache ist abscheulich, ich meine für menschliche Dinge müsse man auch menschliche Ausdrücke finden' (II,421), and the style of his prisoners' discussion is informed by this impatience. Payne's arguments in the course of the discussion draw increasingly on 'menschliche Ausdrücke'; they are common-sense, empirically based arguments, not particularly original, but phrased strongly, colloquially, and idiosyncratically. Obviously, both the ideas expressed and the manner of their discussion are Büchner's, and have nothing

to do with Payne, Chaumette, and Mercier, nor specifically to do with the French Revolution.

Critics dealing with the historical sources have drawn attention to parallels with actual scenes in the Paris gaols, particularly before the execution of the Hébertists, self-proclaimed atheists and violent detractors of organized religion, responsible for the closing of Paris churches or turning them into Temples of Reason.<sup>14</sup> Chaumette was one of these, described by Thiers as 'un des apôtres les plus zélés du culte de la Raison' (p. 185), and so was Anacharsis Clootz, of whose sojourn in gaol Riouffe wrote: '[Il] se mourait de peur qu'un d'eux ne crût en Dieu, prit la parole et leur prêcha le matérialisme jusqu'au dernier soupir' (p.69).<sup>15</sup> Robespierre, with his belief in a Supreme Being, and his equally adamant belief in the need of the people to believe in a Supreme Being, was violently opposed to the atheism of Clootz and the Hébertists, as indeed was Camille Desmoulins who expressed his opposition in particular to Clootz vituperatively and at length in the early issues of *Le Vieux Cordelier* (1825 edition, pp. 39 ff.), numbers read and approved by Robespierre. The religious argumentation of these active revolutionaries was in fact heavily political, Robespierre for example combatting the Hébertist anti-religionism thus:

La Convention n'est point un faiseur de livres et de systèmes. Elle est un corps politique et populaire. L'athéisme est aristocratique. L'idée d'un grand Être, qui veille sur l'innocence opprimée et qui punit le crime triomphant, est toute populaire. Le peuple, les malheureux, m'applaudissent . . . (Thiers, p. 13)

The kind of discussion which Büchner puts into the mouths of Payne, Mercier, and Chaumette has no echoes of the political antagonisms of that kind of contemporary religious debate. Büchner makes no attempt to weave it into the fabric of a realistic revolutionary background, except for the almost inevitable reference to venereal disease, his seemingly standard token gesture to the 'realistic' down-to-earth language of the 'bandits of the Revolution',<sup>16</sup> slightly misplaced, perhaps, in Thomas Payne. What Büchner's Payne does have in common with the historical Clootz, however, is the missionary fervour of the anti-religionist who seems as emotionally compelled to preach his gospel as any evangelical Christian.<sup>17</sup>

The discussion which begins couched coolly in scholastic terminology builds throughout in intensity and turns out to be anything but a cool declaration of materialistic atheism. Payne's actual arguments are, however, straightforward materialist, sensationist ones, once he has delivered his opening formal proof, by definitions, of the non-existence of God: either God created the world or he did not; if he did not, then the world has its first cause in itself, and there is no God, since God is by definition God, in that he is the cause of all being. He cannot however have created the world because either the world is eternal like God, or it has a beginning; if it has a beginning, God must have created it at a specific point in time, which means God underwent a change in time, and this cannot be so, since God is by definition changeless and timeless. Therefore God cannot have created

the world, but we know that it, or at least our ego, exists and must therefore have its cause in itself or in something that is not God, therefore God does not exist.

Mercier immediately picks up the one unexplored hypothesis in Payne's proof: what if the creation is eternal? Payne's answer, no longer an academic one, takes us into one of the pressing intellectual debates of Büchner's own day; men trying to reconcile ideas of God and creation with accumulating evidence of the world's great age and evolution, looked for answers in various kinds of pantheism, of which Spinoza's was one. If the creation is eternal, says Payne, then it is no creation any more, or else it is one with God, or an attribute of God, as Spinoza says. He proceeds to demolish this idea sharply, not by juggling definitions, but by effectively ridiculing Spinoza's God, reducing him with 'menschliche Ausdrücke' to an absurdity; if God is in everything and everybody, then what does that make of his heavenly majesty, 'wenn der liebe Herrgott in jedem von uns Zahnweh kriegen, den Tripper haben, lebendig begraben werden oder wenigstens die sehr unangenehmen Vorstellungen davon haben kann' (III.1.47). This rather simple style of testing abstract ideas against everyday empirical experience marks the reasoning of Ludwig Büchner and the scientific materialists of the later nineteenth century. Ludwig, arguing in *Kraft und Stoff* against the idea of God, dismisses the pantheistic God in a very similar manner:

Wenn Gott in uns Allen und gewissermaßen die Seele der Welt ist, so nimmt er in der That an allen ihren Schlechtigkeiten und Unvollkommenheiten unmittelbaren Antheil. Er bekommt in uns Allen Zahn - oder Leibweh . . . Doch genug des Unsinn! Der pantheistische oder Allgott ist um keines Haares Breite besser, als der persönliche Gott der Theisten.<sup>18</sup>

In the rest of the discussion, Payne puts forward only one more logical argument, this again in straight materialist vein; the world as we experience it is imperfect; how can one deduce a perfect cause from an imperfect effect? Or, as he goes on to put it in 'human' terms, we feel pain, we suffer: 'Das ist der Fels des Atheismus. Das leiseste Zucken des Schmerzes und rege es sich nur in einem Atom, macht einen Riß in der Schöpfung von oben bis unten' (III.1.48). Such argument is reminiscent, not only of nineteenth-century materialists, but those ancient materialists, the Atomists; Epicurus also ruled out the hypothesis that the world was governed by intelligent deities, as being in conflict with the observed facts of the world's imperfections. Büchner's phrasing of the argument: 'Man kann das Böse leugnen, aber nicht den Schmerz; nur der Verstand kann Gott beweisen, das Gefühl empört sich dagegen', places it squarely in sensationist epistemology; we know only what we feel, what we sense, what we experience. We know pain, we feel it, therefore one has to deduce that God, the supposed loving creator, does not exist.

The same recognition underlies Payne's denial of 'die Moral'. The connexion between his denial of God and his denial of the concepts of good and evil is not the simple cause-and-effect connexion of: there is no God, therefore there is no morality. Instead we meet again that irritable sense that the philosophers have got it all wrong.

Some want to say that the existence of man's moral sense proves the existence of God, others that the existence of God enforces a moral sense. 'Was wollt ihr denn mit eurer Moral?' asks Payne crossly (III.1.49). We know pain and we know pleasure; through these sensations we know what is good or bad for us; we cannot know objectively what is good or bad.

This again is anything but a new idea.<sup>19</sup> Not only does it also go back to Epicurus, but it crops up in the wake of Hobbes and Locke constantly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Condillac, Bentham, Cabanis and his 'physiological philosophers', and so on. It is not in the originality of the ideas expressed that the interest of this scene lies. Büchner undoubtedly knew that they were philosophically rudimentary. The scene is interesting because it brings together in one straight discussion several strands of thought which run through the play as well as some apparently conflicting emotions: thoughts on the nature of the world and the nature of man and the conflicting emotions which arise from them. It is only if one views the play as dealing with the nature of society, an economic and political entity somehow apart, that one can regard this scene as a strange interlude.

There is a sense in which it is a 'statische Einlage' and a dramatically superfluous one, not in that Büchner is interposing his ideas on religion into a play that is 'about' something else, but in that he is allowing himself the easy ploy of letting faceless characters argue out straightforwardly ideas which are in the forefront of his mind and which occur in one form or another rather haphazardly throughout the play. A more mature dramatist or one with more time might well have eliminated this scene altogether in a second or third draft of the play, and integrated its ideas into genuine interplay between known characters. *Dantons Tod* was, however, written so quickly and by such a young man, that one has the opportunity to follow the more or less blatant working out of the author's interests in what amounts to a first draft of the play.

Act II ended with a speech given on the barest pretext to St Just. Act III begins with a piece of dialogue given to unknown persons without the merest token attempt to adapt idea to character. This piece of dialogue allows Büchner, not to interpose atheistic ideas, but to move directly from St Just's devastating description of an evolving natural and social world into a straightforward debate on the question which had to be faced by most nineteenth-century thinkers who contemplated such a world – did God then create this? St Just's speech makes nonsense of the idea of a loving father-creator God without even mentioning it. His World Spirit wading through the corpses of natural and social revolutions is no beneficent God. Is there a place for a loving father-creator God in a natural world inexorably obeying physical laws? Even among the scientists of the nineteenth century, there were not many who, when faced with the question of God's existence, could answer calmly with Laplace, 'I have no need of that hypothesis', and Büchner, on the evidence of *Dantons Tod*, was not one of them.



Büchner's Payne preaches materialism to his fellow-prisoners with all the fervour of the apostle of reason, Anacharsis Clootz. He feels very strongly about God. Critics have noted the personal emotionalism of such lines as: 'Muß denn Gott einmal schaffen, kann er nur was Unvollkommenes schaffen, so läßt er es gescheuter ganz bleiben' (III.1.48). Mayer writes of these lines: 'Die Worte sind wüst, blasphemisch; aber hinter ihnen steht tiefer Ernst und tiefe Trauer' (p. 347). Behind them is also a great deal of anger, anger against the kind of father who would bring up his sons in pig-sties and galleys<sup>20</sup> – an interesting amount of anger against a father who does not, the speaker is at pains to prove, exist. Feeling, he says, is outraged at the idea of such a God,<sup>21</sup> but one senses at the same time a less than logical posture of outrage at the existence of pain in a God-created world. His anger against the folly of man who has invented for himself the cruelly deceptive myth of a kindly father-God as creator of the world with all its pain is scarcely distinguishable from his anger against a father-God who knowingly inflicts pain on his creatures. Much of the flailing about of the Dantonists in their agony as the play moves towards the guillotine is rooted, it seems to me, in this double anger, logically indefensible but emotionally real.

It gives rise to two attitudes which, until one understands their common emotional root, do not sit very well together: on the one hand, an anger against the injustice of human pain and suffering, sometimes verging on self-pity and sometimes approaching heroic despair; on the other hand, a cynical insistence that there is no reason to expect life to be anything but decay, or standards for judging such things as justice and injustice, good and evil, to be anything but self-delusion. Thus it is possible in the closing gaol scenes for the Dantonists sardonically to undercut each other's intermittent heroic postures by mocking each attempt to give their approaching death some larger social or humanitarian meaning, but it takes only the suggestion by the religious Philippeau that there is a divine ear in which all these earthly discords are a stream of harmonies, for the Dantonists to launch one after the other into a moving, despairing litany of pain, a series of striking images, unmistakable cries of anger against the gods: we are the poor musicians and our bodies are the instruments; are the ugly sounds which are scratched out on them only there so that they may rise higher and higher, and finally die out in a voluptuous breath in heavenly ears? Are we like young pigs, whipped to death to make our flesh more succulent for the tables of princes? Are we children, roasted in the Moloch-arms of the earth, tickled with rays of light to make the gods laugh? Is the ether with its golden eyes a bowl of golden carp, which stands on the table of the gods, and the gods laugh for ever and the fish die for ever and the gods enjoy for ever the play of colours in the death struggle? The intended logical answer to all these questions is, of course, the answer to the religious Philippeau: no, there is no God who hears harmony in our dissonance; but their emotional impact is one of burning anger against the injustice of the suffering of innocents, and the callousness of their tormentors – this from men who two minutes earlier were

calmly expounding another of the play's themes: all men are Epicureans, doing what pleases them, striking even in death the postures which come easiest to them.

To respond to these two superficially quite divergent stances in close context is, if one takes them seriously, as difficult as to respond positively to Marion and Julie in the same room, and this is the kind of difficulty which besets us at times throughout the play if we try seriously to find some coherent intellectual pattern in the positions taken by the characters of *Dantons Tod*. The last gaol scene of the play 'works' mainly because, as we have already observed, we do *not* take the anti-heroic cynicism altogether seriously at this point: the prisoners' appeal to our emotions is preponderantly that of brave, despairing men facing death. All that matters in the theatre is that the scene should 'work', and on the whole it does. But as critics we are not interpreting the thought of Büchner if we select either one of these two stances as being significant and ignore the other.

### 3. *Attempted Resolutions*

In recent criticism, Wittkowski quite rightly senses the strong emotional response of Büchner to God, and for that reason calls him 'deeply religious'.<sup>22</sup> Petersen, on the other hand, quite rightly recognizes his intellectual rejection of absolute moral standards and for that reason sees in his work a secular anti-Kantian, proto-Nietzschean 'Aufhebung der Moral' (See above, Chapter II, Section 1). Such critics may well be sincerely incapable of responding emotionally themselves to both of these seemingly divergent stances which Büchner casually places side by side, sometimes in the self-same character; if they are to make their overall interpretations convincing, they have to omit some of the evidence or make it fit.

Wittkowski, responding strongly to Payne's denial-quasi-denunciation of God, tries to make sense of Danton's character as created by a 'deeply religious' Büchner. Danton, he suggests, is not a consistent atheist – he appeals after all in gaol for the forgiveness of God and man – but he is 'der Prophet des Genusses, des Natürlichen, und das heißt: des Hurens, Stehlens, Lügens, Mordens, kurz, des Ärgerns'. Danton's confessed murders are counted by Wittkowski among his 'offences' alongside his erotic relationship with Marion which 'sticht negativ ab gegen die Verbundenheit mit seiner Frau'. Looking then at the various statements in the play that man acts according to his nature, he deduces: 'Hier haben wir es: der Drang zum Ärgern liegt in der menschlichen Natur' (Wittkowski (1973), p. 371). Thus he runs together two quite distinct strands of thought in the play – the Dantonists' surely genuine call for natural sensual enjoyment and Danton's equally genuine horror at what it is in man that forces him to perform cruel and vicious acts – and turns the central problem of the play into man's struggle with something like original sin.

One probably comes closer to the sense of Büchner's play if one admits that there are distinct strands of thought in it which cannot be run together without contradiction, that Büchner himself has not really attempted to reconcile them, nor worked out consistently what they mean in every dimension and in a variety of

circumstances. It is very hard, for example, to resolve with any clarity the problem which Wittkowski tries to resolve. When various characters talk of acting according to their nature, they seem to be asserting an individualist principle of action, boldly insisting that the individual should do what gives him pleasure; but the 'muß' speech of Danton does imply that the individual has no choice in what he does, and in the light of that speech, the bold assertion of individuality fades into a plea that one has no choice but to act according to one's nature. One can imagine that to the young Büchner, it must have seemed to be sometimes the one and sometimes the other. It is equally hard to say, when characters allude vaguely to forces outside themselves – Danton's 'Geister' and 'unbekannte Gewalten' or St Just's 'Weltgeist' – whether one is supposed to take them seriously as actual supernatural powers or not. And if not, if these characters are speaking in metaphors, what kind of forces does Büchner really think they have in mind? Quite probably this was still a considerable puzzle to *him*. And what of the 'Volk', the poor and the hungry? Their lives seem to be controlled by economic deprivation. Is that part of a greater 'Schicksal'? Yet Büchner's Erster Bürger and others seem in all sincerity to hold certain people, certain richer sections of society, responsible. Are the rich responsible? Or, to come full circle, are they not simply living as pleases them, obeying their individualist drives? Büchner is tangling with very difficult problems in *Dantons Tod*, problems which have defeated men who spent their lives addressing themselves specifically to them. Jeremy Bentham, for example, whose utilitarianism is based on the belief that mankind is governed by two sovereign motives, pain and pleasure, never, in some people's estimation, reconciled this individualist principle of action with his sincerely held belief that the object of all legislation must be the greatest good for the greatest number. Why should one expect Georg Büchner to have resolved such problems either in his own mind or in his first play?

It is in any case not uncommon for people, even life-long professional thinkers such as Bentham, sincerely to hold beliefs which seem obviously self-contradictory to other people; this is one of the small paradoxes of life which we sometimes overlook in our desire to propound coherently the 'Weltanschauung' of a beloved author. Wittkowski overlooks this possibility when he states categorically that one is 'auf dem Holzweg' if one sees any kind of genuinely propounded 'Genußreligion' in *Dantons Tod*, since the latter implies a social ethic to which Büchner cannot possibly be subscribing. Marion's pleasure, he says, involves the pain of others, the death, not least, of her first lover; Büchner therefore cannot seriously be advocating Marion's right to take her pleasure where she may (Wittkowski (1973), p. 355). *Quod erat demonstrandum*. The basic reasoning behind this 'proof' is that no right-thinking person could think along such lines; Büchner is a right-thinking person, therefore he must be thinking something else. When critics feel intuitively like this that various attitudes of Büchner's characters in *Dantons Tod* obviously cannot belong together in one coherent 'Weltanschauung', they usually feel quite

naturally compelled to relate them in such a way that one attitude colours or absorbs or nullifies the other.

A coherent 'Weltanschauung' cannot, for many people, accommodate a responsible social ethic and a 'Genußreligion'. Wittkowski's answer is to deny that the latter exists. Other people, with different preoccupations, see different contradictions: a coherent 'Weltanschauung', for example, which has a place for a 'Genußreligion' (or better expressed, a genuine pleasure in sensual experience), cannot for some people also accommodate 'nihilism' or a strong sense of the worthlessness of everything. Margaret Jacobs implies an answer to this in her analysis of the street scene 'Eine Promenade' (II.2.34-37). She says of Danton's comments in this scene that they 'reveal the fact that Danton's affirmation of life in its sensual aspects is closely related to his nihilism' (p. xxi). But what lies behind this 'close relation' here? Danton makes two comments in this scene, the first beginning 'Geht das nicht lustig?', and the second 'Mute mir nur nichts Ernsthaftes zu'. The first is a straightforwardly crude expression of a desire for sex in the street (see above, p. 13), the second, a boisterous notion that everyone should stop in the streets and laugh in each others' faces: 'Ich meine sie müßten zu den Fenstern und zu den Gräbern heraus lachen und der Himmel müsse bersten und die Erde müsse sich wälzen vor Lachen'. These comments can be read in their context as a rather wild outburst of sexually-charged high spirits. Margaret Jacobs suggests this partially in her comment, 'Danton revels with lurid delight in the erotic atmosphere', but then goes on 'and finds life worthless, trivial and gruesomely ridiculous. "It's enough to make the dead laugh", is his reaction'. In this way, she relates Danton's affirmation of sensuality to his nihilism. Certainly, in view of various statements made by Danton elsewhere in the play, it is undeniable that he finds life worthless, trivial, and gruesomely ridiculous. Are these words necessarily to be applied, however, to his feelings about sensual pleasure? One can make an equally reasonable case for saying that physical sexual pleasures are for Danton quite straightforwardly physical sexual pleasures, not to be automatically associated with such epithets as 'lurid', 'gruesome', and 'ridiculous'.

It is Büchner himself who tempts us to make such associations by not himself 'relating' the points of view expressed by his characters. But these points of view are perhaps better understood if one takes them at face value, side by side, but separate and 'unrelated' in the sense of not necessarily being measured one against the other. We saw this phenomenon early on in our analysis of the distinct groups of 'invented' characters, the mob, the whores, and the wives, where one-dimensional contrasting motives stood out clearly one against the other. Here one might have objected that Büchner could not possibly be subscribing to the quite different ethics underlying their behaviour. Yet the fact is that Büchner can and does place them side by side, and there is no overwhelming evidence that his own sympathies are more strongly with the whoring and begging poor, the selfishly enjoying Marion, or the loving and self-sacrificing wives. Similarly, but admittedly more be-

wilderingly, when one turns to the complicated character of Danton, one finds separate and distinct elements. His 'nihilism' is something other than his affirmation of sensual pleasures, and neither is merged coherently into any 'social ethic'. His cynicism, furthermore, stands cheek by jowl with another aspect of his character which is not often pinpointed as being separate and distinct, but is in my view best recognized as such: namely a totally serious, uncynical self-questioning, merging sometimes, paradoxically, with a denial of ideals and values which is so often equated with his cynicism.

It should be emphasized that drawing attention to the disparateness of these elements is not the same as arguing that contradiction is the essence of the play, or that Büchner has intentionally created characters whose strength and interest lie in their inner contradictions. This is a recurring commonplace of Büchner criticism. Viëtor long since recognized the lack of unity in Danton's character, but said of it: 'Nicht weil Büchner es nicht fertig brachte, Dantons Gestalt zu runden und zu klären, ist sie so tief zwiespältig. Grade dieser Widerspruch, dies Nicht-"aus-einem-Guß"-Sein, ist ihre Essenz. So sieht Büchner seinen Helden, so will er ihn darstellen'.<sup>23</sup> Yet in the same paragraph, in which he speaks of the 'Geheimnis von Dantons Person', he has already begun to make his own sense of the 'mystery', to resolve some of the 'essential' contradiction by explaining how Danton's former revolutionary fighting strength has been paralysed by weariness and scepticism, which have eaten away at his roots like a deadly worm. Elsewhere, he singles out what is to him the 'ultimate cynicism' of Danton (and of Büchner himself) – 'Unglück als Genuß', 'die Wollust der Schmerzen', the fine Epicureanism of suffering – and argues that anyone who thinks in this way cannot be a social revolutionary.<sup>24</sup> So it is that critics who assert, as does Benn, that one should not ask for logical consistency in the character of Danton – 'Its absence is a merit, for Büchner is not concerned with abstract demonstrations but with psychological realities, and his hero has all the complexity and inconsistency that is characteristic of real human-beings'<sup>25</sup> – often cannot resist going ahead and making their own 'psychological' sense of Danton in which the 'essential' inconsistencies are in effect explained away.

The temptation to try and make psychological sense of the play beckons us all – that is one of the never-ending attractions of *Dantons Tod* – but one is on the wrong track, in my view, in trying to make psychological sense of the characters. I do not agree with Viëtor that Büchner 'sees his hero' as a deeply dichotomous figure and wants to present him as such, nor with Benn that his concern in this play is with 'psychological realities'. It seems to me rather that his concern in *Dantons Tod* is very much with ideas, and his matching of these ideas to his characters is sometimes a rather haphazard business. He does 'see his hero' in a certain way when he sits down to write the play, but in the five frantic weeks of composition, the ideas which he pours emotionally on to the paper combine with

the historical 'facts', in which he also has a serious interest, to swamp the rather tenuous psychological reality of his own Danton of Act I.

A closer consideration of this suggested process of creation can perhaps help us to understand, rather than falsely to resolve, some of the contradictory aspects of Danton's character, and in particular that point of his character on which so often, as Peacock says, 'interpretations fall apart' (p. 184): namely his extreme pessimism, or what is variously called his 'Weltschmerz', 'Langeweile', 'ennui', 'cynicism', or 'nihilism'. It has various names and is explained in various ways, but it is generally assumed to be largely Büchner's own imaginative creation, deepening the historical Danton's character, or, in another view, added to it. We have looked at some of the complexities of Büchner's historical Danton; it remains to link these to the further complexities of what Peacock has straightforwardly called Büchner's 'private Danton'.

## CHAPTER VI

### BÜCHNER'S PRIVATE DANTON

#### 1. *How Many Dantons?*

Ronald Peacock, who neither sees the dichotomy in Danton as an essential feature of his artistic creation, nor provides any explanatory synthesis of diverse elements of his character, suggests instead that *Dantons Tod* is better understood if we simply recognize that there are in it two Dantons, the historical Danton and Büchner's private Danton. He describes the latter thus:

This Danton – the Danton of 'Langeweile', of the nihilistic world-chaos, the Danton who identifies the sensation of love with that of the grave, who seeks macabre images or exaggerative and deliberately cynical epitomizations to describe life – this is, in my view, not the same Danton, developed and made fuller and richer, but a different one added to the play and related to the other only as a caricature. This is Georg Büchner's private Danton. (p. 184)

I agree entirely that the Danton described here is Büchner's private Danton, but I am less inclined than Peacock to talk in terms of his being 'added to the play'. Added he most certainly is to the historical Danton, but to say, as Peacock does, that the language he speaks, the attitude he embodies, while not insincere, 'spoil the play', is to suggest mainly that one wishes Büchner had written a different play. This is of course what Peacock does quite explicitly suggest (p. 183). The private Danton of Büchner, however, liked or disliked, does weave various threads of argument and emotion through the existing play which are absolutely basic to its texture. And it is this Danton who, in my opinion, looms much larger in the mind of the author as he starts on the blank page to create his Danton than any coherent conception of the part played by the real Danton in the historical drama of the French Revolution.

There is a historical 'fact' behind the extreme pessimism of Büchner's private Danton, and I would suggest that it probably attracted Büchner greatly on his reading of the sources, so that he seized upon it, as he did upon the facts of Danton's vice and Robespierre's virtue, responding with enthusiasm to the appealing possibilities of character-development which it must have seemed initially to offer him. This enthusiasm again carried him far beyond the historical 'fact' – in this case, Danton's inaction in the face of threatened political moves against him, the onset of apparent lethargy, the 'espèce de sommeil' mentioned in the sources. It seems

indeed in a sense to have carried him into the play itself; certainly his private Danton drenches the first scene of the play with his particular brand of 'extreme pessimism'.

G.A.Wells, noting that Büchner's Danton is paralysed by cynicism from the first, writes: 'In Act II, we begin to see the cause of his pessimism. He feels he can only save his life by violent behaviour that would send others to the guillotine; and "ich will lieber guillotiniert werden, als guillotiniert lassen"' (Wells, p.102). The scene to which he is referring here (II.1.31-33) is one in which the precise relationship between the historical Danton (or Dantons) and Büchner's private Danton (or Dantons) can very profitably be examined. One can follow in some detail the process whereby Büchner takes the setting and incident from the sources, and writes his own dialogue for his own Danton, adding to it various comments attributed by the sources to Danton himself on his refusal to mount a political struggle against Robespierre. If one is attempting to see Danton as a coherent dramatic figure, then it makes sense to regard these comments, as Wells does, as expressing the cause of Danton's pessimism. Certainly they may be said to express possible causes of the historic Danton's inaction, as viewed by two different historians, a matter in itself of some complexity, but whether they begin to reveal in the second act of the play the root cause of Büchner's Danton's pessimism is a more complex question still.

It all becomes clearer if one looks at the actual narratives in the sources from which Büchner took several key phrases. The usual method of critics dealing with the sources is to focus upon Büchner's scene, and indicate how many of the actual phrases are 'historic': the whole scene then appears to have a historical flavour. Starting the other way round, as Büchner himself started, from the sources themselves, one sees much more strikingly the highly personal flavour which Büchner gave to the story. Thiers describes how, after the death of the extremist Hébertists, Robespierre was under much pressure to move against the moderate Dantonists; Danton was equally under pressure from his own friends to make a move against Robespierre. Thiers writes:

Les amis de Danton l'entouraient, le pressaient de sortir de son espèce de sommeil, de secouer sa paresse, et de montrer enfin ce front révolutionnaire qui ne s'était jamais montré en vain dans les orages. — Je le sais, disait Danton, ils veulent m'arrêter! . . . mais non, ajoutait-il, ils n'oseront pas. D'ailleurs que pouvait-il faire? Fuir lui était impossible. Quel pays voudrait donner asile à ce révolutionnaire formidable? Devait-il autoriser par sa fuite toutes les calomnies de ses ennemis? Et puis il aimait son pays. Emporte-t-on, s'écriait-il, sa patrie à *la semelle de ses souliers*? D'autre part, demeurant en France, il lui restait peu moyens à employer. Les cordeliers appartenaient aux ultra-révolutionnaires, les jacobins à Robespierre. La Convention était tremblante. Sur quelle force s'appuyer? (p. 201)

This description of the incident, made up partially of 'quotations' from Danton, partially of Thiers's comments, has, it will be observed, its own logic. Danton is



first of all doubtful that his enemies will dare to move against him. In any case, asks Thiers, where could such a notable revolutionary go to find refuge? Besides, he loved his country: given that fact, if he wanted to stay in France, he had no recourse, because the various power groups were committed to his enemies or in disarray: a quite rational explanation of his behaviour with no inner contradictions. It is Mignet, in his separate version, who writes: 'Ses amis le conjuraient de se défendre: J'aime mieux, répondait-il, être guillotiné que guillotineur; d'ailleurs ma vie n'en vaut pas la peine et l'humanité m'ennuie' (pp. 428 f.). Mignet's version has the seeds of a self-contradictory posture: if one interprets Danton's unwillingness to play the part of executioner as a humanitarian impulse, this might seem to jar slightly with the phrase, 'l'humanité m'ennuie'. Mignet at any rate gives the two expressions equal weight.

In Büchner's version, it is Danton's boredom with life and humanity which sets the keynote of the whole scene. Furthermore it is, from the start, a boredom with a particular flavour, a boredom expressed in the languid, sophisticated tones of the drawing-room cynic, intent on impressing, shocking and annoying his friends, first of all with his mockery of the mundane things of everyday life – how boring it is to put on one's clothes every day, to crawl into bed in the evening and out of it in the morning, to put one foot in front of the other – Lacroix cuts into this display of yawns with his angry accusations that Danton is dragging his friends down to destruction with him, a speech taken word for word from one of Lacroix's exhortations to Danton recounted in *Unsere Zeit* (p. 91). Danton gives him a short political answer, derived in part from Thiers's view of Danton's downfall (see below, p.90): his popular support has gone; the people respect him now only as they respect the dead. Why has he allowed it to reach this point, asks Lacroix, and Danton lapses again into his yawning indifference – how boring it all is, always running around in the same coat, making the same faces. The solid practical reasons which are the core of Thiers's explanation for Danton's inaction are introduced almost incidentally by Büchner – 'Uebrigens auf was sich stützen?' – and he spices them characteristically with the grotesque suggestion, 'Unsere Huren könnten es noch mit den Guillotinenbetschwernern aufnehmen', thus reducing the ideological struggle between the Dantonists and Robespierrists to a ludicrous and tawdry level; he further consolidates his own picture of Danton the lecher, whose sexual habits are contributing to his political downfall, by changing Thiers's straight statement that the Jacobins belonged to Robespierre to 'Die Jacobiner haben erklärt, daß die Tugend an der Tagesordnung sey', an event that may be footnoted with some reservations as historical (see above, p.48), but which Thiers's Danton did not cite as an obstacle to his chances of saving himself.

Mignet's line, 'Ich will lieber guillotiniert werden, als guillotiniern lassen', leads Danton into another speculation never voiced by the historical Danton: what is wrong with the human being? Why can he not live peaceably with his fellows? There was something wrong when we were created – we won't tear it out of each

other's intestines, so why go on tearing open each other's bodies? – a serious question for our bored drawing-room cynic, not answered, but mocked in the parodying echo of Camille. The down-to-earth seriousness of Philippeau's next question, 'Und Frankreich bleibt seinen Henkern?' is turned aside with a deliberately virtuoso display of sheer cynicism: unhappiness saves people from boredom, what does it matter how, or how soon, they die? And he elaborates artificially on the idea with a cluster of witticisms: life is too long, a long coat which should be shortened, better an epigram than an epic; better to drink drops of life from a liqueur glass than from a barrel. Finally, the words of Mignet, sounding at this point like a petulant postscript: 'Endlich – ich müßte schreien, das ist mir der Mühe zuviel, das Leben ist nicht die Arbeit werth, die man sich macht, es zu erhalten.' 'So flieh Danton!' suggests Paris, and in another passionate turn-about, our primadonna of the salon drops his voice to a tone of emotional sincerity, and asks the historic question: 'Nimmt man das Vaterland an den Schuhsohlen mit?' (see Thiers, p.201 and p.87 above) only to retrieve instantly his posture of cool indifference, and leave the stage with a swagger – 'Komm mein Junge, ich sage dir sie werden's nicht wagen. Adieu. Adieu!'

This is a virtuoso performance on the part of Büchner's Danton, and in my opinion one of Büchner's most successful attempts at making his original Danton seem for the moment psychologically real in his historical setting. Critics have pointed to logical inconsistencies, not only the one lurking potentially in Mignet's version of the scene between humanitarianism and cynicism towards humanity, but more broadly between the patriotism inherent in the historic sentence, 'Nimmt man das Vaterland an den Schuhsohlen mit?' and the generally cynical value-system of the Danton of the play as a whole. Critics who are viewing Danton as a coherent character can find explanations for the latter, as does G.A.Wells when he writes, 'Danton's cynicism has not entirely obliterated the patriotism of his former days' (p. 103). Giorgio Dolfini, on the other hand, who is more ready than most critics to put such inconsistencies down to incoherence in character conception, poses the question directly: What place has the concept 'patria' in a disenchanting and lucidly pessimistic system, in a problematic scale of ethical values such as Danton's? Dolfini gives as the most likely answer the direct one: Danton is simply incoherent because of the way Büchner has assimilated source materials into his text which do not fit his Danton. But he also allows another possibility for this particular scene, namely that Büchner is here deliberately using inconsistency and incoherence as a way of demasking the character of his Danton. He quotes in support of this the words of Lacroix after Danton has left: 'Da geht er hin', says Philippeau, to which Lacroix replies, 'Und glaubt kein Wort von dem was er gesagt hat.'<sup>1</sup>

It is my belief that one can at this point in the play attribute some such subtlety to Büchner's handling of Danton's character as Dolfini suggests. There is an incompatibility between genuine humanitarianism, genuine patriotism, and a brutally

expressed cynicism. Büchner has, however, early in the play, a firm enough hold on his own initial conception of Danton as a sophisticate, a 'Genießer', someone who does and says things only 'zum Zeitvertreib',<sup>2</sup> for any incompatibility in attitudes expressed in this scene to seem quite plausibly characteristic as he thrashes about flamboyantly from one self-indulgent outburst to the next. Even without Lacroix's postscript, to which Dolfini quite rightly draws attention, one is left with a sense that Danton is not deeply committed to a word he says, that he is deliberately playing up and down the scale of his friends' emotions, that Büchner himself is aware and in command of the way that *he* is playing on the emotions of his audience, playing quite deliberately with ideas of his own about the boredom and futility of life, and sprinkling these ideas adroitly with quotations from the sources.

It becomes harder for him to play this game altogether successfully as the drama unfolds. There are various reasons for this, some of them having to do with those historical 'realities' which seriously concern Büchner; he tries seriously, for example, to come to terms with a Danton who felt responsible for the September massacres. Furthermore, as we have seen, he continues to draw on various people's versions of the historical Danton and to incorporate these in pieces into his play. The cumulative effect of this method, carried out, one must remember, with some speed, is almost bound to confuse certain issues. He goes on quoting directly from Thiers, for example, yet by placing centre-stage from the start a bored, witty, lascivious Danton, playing wantonly with his own life and that of his friends, he has *a priori* rejected Thiers's own quite carefully constructed portrait of Danton. To appreciate this, one has only to read Thiers's own analysis of Danton's inaction which he appends to his description of Danton's responses to his friends' appeals (see above, p.87):

Voilà ce que n'ont pas assez considéré ceux qui, ayant vu cet homme si puissant foudroyer le trône au 10. août, soulever le peuple contre les étrangers, n'ont pu concevoir qu'il soit tombé sans résistance. Le génie révolutionnaire ne consiste point à refaire une popularité perdue, à créer des forces qui n'existent pas mais à diriger hardiment les affections d'un peuple quand on les possède. La générosité de Danton, son éloignement des affaires, lui avaient presque aliéné la faveur populaire, et ne lui en avaient du moins pas laissé assez pour renverser l'autorité régnante. Dans cette conviction de son impuissance, il attendait et se répétait: *Ils n'oseront pas*. Il était permis de croire que devant un si grand nom, de si grands services, ses adversaires hésiteraient. Puis il retombait dans sa paresse, et dans cette insouciance des êtres forts, qui attendent le danger, sans se trop agiter pour s'y soustraire. (pp. 201 f.)

It seems quite clear that Thiers's Danton, as here described, could for example quite plausibly rise up before the Revolutionary Tribunal and enumerate proudly his great deeds. That Danton, who awaited arrest 'with the laziness and carelessness of strong men who await danger without straining themselves to avoid it' could well

thunder at his audience that men of his stripe were indispensable to revolutions. Those other words which Thiers's Danton also hurled at his accusers, 'Au reste peu m'importe, vous et votre jugement . . . je vous l'ai dit: le néant sera bientôt mon asyle. La vie m'est à charge, qu'on me l'arrache ... il me tarde d'en être délivré' (p.218), vibrate on the lips of this 'être fort' with defiance and bravado. The 'pessimism', 'cynicism', 'nihilism', of Büchner's Danton surely stem from a quite different character. A critic who can say of the very passage in which Thiers writes of the 'insouciance des êtres forts', 'Diese Sätze sind geradezu ein Schema für Büchners Gestaltung gewesen, und die Charakteristik zielt nicht auf einen Typus des zur Tat überhaupt unkräftigen, des dekadenten Nichtstuers oder blasiierten Aristokraten. Büchner hält sich zunächst an das Bild, das die Geschichtsbücher von Danton geben',<sup>3</sup> this critic is simply not seeing the Danton who appears in black and white on the pages of Büchner's text.<sup>4</sup>

Büchner, in Acts I and II of *Dantons Tod*, has created, whether one likes it or not, the beginnings of a sophisticated blasé 'Nichtstuer'. Some admirers of Büchner might not like this any more than the admirers of the historical Danton, but this is the character who dominates the early scenes of the play. It is not only historical 'reality' and other people's versions of that reality which tamper with the wholeness of that portrait as the play goes on. Even in that early Danton, Büchner himself is sowing the seeds of another Danton who will be hard to keep within the bounds of an idly speculative, sensually revelling sophisticate. Better that we as admirers of Büchner understand this than that we turn to an unconvincing version of Thiers's Danton to rescue Danton as a 'serious' character, and *Dantons Tod* as a vehicle of serious thought.

## 2. Danton's 'Extreme Pessimism'

*Dantons Tod* is in my view a vehicle of serious thought, and it is the thought of a young inquiring mind, not of a fully-fledged philosopher. It is not at all to be improved by being elevated into what it is not.<sup>5</sup> Peacock observes that those writers who do not choose to interpret the play sociologically turn to the 'extreme pessimism' of Danton to find decisive evidence of the play's having 'a "metaphysical" foundation, or a universalized human tragic note, or a "religious" meaning or of being a nihilistic gospel' (p. 184). Peacock himself rejects such interpretations, and suggests that they arise 'from the assumption, all too common, that poetic works express *a priori* a valid finalized "Weltanschauung", or perhaps also from the habit of taking scattered statements too absolutely, and constructing from them logical and systematic schemes of thought'. One should, I believe, take Peacock's warning very much to heart, and recognize that what is called Danton's extreme pessimism, or more grandly Danton's 'philosophy', is in fact a series of scattered statements, some of them cynical, some pessimistic, some amusing, some clever-sounding and empty of substance, some factual and sober, some sentimental and romantic, and some seriously speculative and quite uncynical. Some of them do

carry distinct threads of argument through the play, picked up now and then by other characters, but they do not in any sense add up to a coherent personal 'Weltanschauung' for Danton.

It is important to see that while such words as 'pessimism', 'cynicism', and 'nihilism', are often used almost interchangeably in discussions of Danton, not one of them is a suitable blanket word to cover all his scattered statements. I have argued that the Danton of the early part of the play is a reasonably plausible dramatic figure, who can successfully convince an audience as a blasé 'Genuß-mensch', playing with people and ideas, defeating all comers with his wit, shocking them with his coquetry with death and the idea of death. This is the Danton who in the first scene of the play plays with images of love and death ('Nein Julie, ich liebe dich wie das Grab.'). enjoying the shock effect on the delicate Julie, and wallowing in exaggerative elaborations of the image ('Du süßes Grab, deine Lippen sind Todtenglocken, deine Stimme ist mein Grabgeläute, deine Brust mein Grabhügel und dein Herz mein Sarg.'). But the Danton who says in the same scene, 'We are pachyderms . . . we have crude senses . . . how can we know each other? . . . we would have to break open each other's skulls and tear the thoughts out of each other's brain fibres', this Danton cannot ultimately be sustained as a character who talks for talking's sake, who does not believe a word he says. He is asking a serious question about human relationships, as is the Danton of that other scene of cynical self-display (II, I) when he asks, 'What is wrong with human beings? What is the name for what is missing? One cannot tear it out of the intestines, why go on tearing each other's bodies apart?' The question is lost in a sea of clever cynicisms, but is in itself anything but cynical.

Büchner in *Dantons Tod* cannot resist explicitly introducing serious questions about human behaviour and its motivation into the actual dialogue of several of his characters, and he does undercut in the process his ability to present on stage coherently differentiated antagonists in the well-defined ideological drama of the French Revolution. He early gives up, as we have seen, his Robespierre, the prudish bigot who steps back to examine his motives at the end of Act I, and virtually disappears from the play. It is not surprising that his hold on that Robespierre's antagonist, the world-weary, worldly wise Danton of Act I, loosens in the course of Act II, in which a Danton, tortured by something other than boredom, faces his worst political crimes; here the question 'What is it in us that whores, lies, steals, murders', is not submerged in cynicism and macabre word-games but stands as an agonized cry at the heart of the scene. Danton does not subsequently disappear from the play, but the young playwright does seem to give up the difficult dramatic task of creating a believable cynical playboy with a tortured conscience and matching him to the gigantic hero-villain Danton of history. Instead he allows his Danton simply to pour out ideas in a welter of emotional reactions to his death-cell experiences of Acts III and IV.

These outbursts have given rise to some of the most high-flown interpretations of his 'philosophy'. His much discussed speeches on 'das Nichts', for example (III.7.61), serve as the main underpinning of 'nihilist' interpretations of *Dantons Tod*. Baumann's commentary on the scene is a healthy antidote to this sort of inflation: 'Was er [Danton] dann in abgerissenen Sätzen vorbringt, Fragen und gehäufte Ausrufe, beansprucht weder logische Stringenz noch völlige geistige Durchdringung, es sind Eruptionen aufgestauter Widersprüche, mehr glühend als erleuchtet, bemerkenswert durch ihr Ungestüm, weniger durch ihren Gehalt' (Baumann (1976), pp. 71 f.). Nevertheless, one is missing some of the thought-currents in *Dantons Tod* if one fails to see that, while it is anything but a nihilist gospel, Danton's outburst does have a quite specific content; it is violent emotional reaction, yes, but to some quite specific ideas. The opening exchange,

*Philippeau.* Was willst du denn?  
*Danton.* Ruhe.  
*Philippeau.* Die ist in Gott.  
*Danton.* Im Nichts,

leads into a bewildering passage in which images and metaphorical statements have to be disentangled from expressions of theoretical ideas, of physical fact, and of outright fantasy.

Peace is in God, says Philippeau. 'Im Nichts', says Danton. Can one be submerged in anything more peaceful than nothingness, and if the greatest peace is God, is not nothingness God? So far a game of definitions. Then comes the much-quoted sentence, 'Aber ich bin ein Atheist.' Various construed, as a statement of non-belief in a personal God,<sup>6</sup> more histrionically as 'no statement of fact but a cry of despair' (Stern (1971), p.42), commentators have tried in different ways to incorporate it into the general argument of the paragraph. Benn, for example, writes: 'If nothingness is God, he [Danton] must confess himself an atheist, for he disbelieves in the possibility of nothingness' (Benn (1976), p. 118). A reading such as this implies that Danton might believe in God, if God is something other than nothingness, 'I am an atheist' being then a conditional, not an absolute statement (. . . *then* I am an atheist, rather than the *but* of the text). In my own reading, it is closer to a simple statement of fact than to a cry of despair, and is incorporated more or less parenthetically, even somewhat humorously or at least wryly, into the argument: Danton has, by juggling definitions, 'proved' to the religious Philippeau that nothingness is God, but then he reflects wryly that he is after all an atheist, and therefore has to believe that because he is, materially, something, he will never be able to submerge himself in nothingness. Rather than a disbelief in the possibility of nothingness, this is an expression of disbelief in the possibility of becoming nothing himself. His words are: 'Aber ich bin ein Atheist. Der verfluchte Satz: etwas kann nicht zu nichts werden! und ich bin etwas, das ist der Jammer!' Those who loosely equate Danton's 'nihilism' with his atheism are

perhaps missing the point of the 'verfluchter Satz': it is his atheism which forces him to accept the 'accursed phrase' and to deny himself the possibility of total annihilation.

This accursed phrase, 'something cannot become nothing', is one of the cornerstone tenets of atheistic materialism, deriving as it does from those ancient atheists, the Atomists, handed down by Epicurus and further by Lucretius; they held firmly to the belief that nothing could not become something, and something could not become nothing. The world therefore could not have been created out of a void; there were always atoms in the void, which accidentally coalesced into larger bodies. Physical material entities so formed could not disappear into nothing, but could only disintegrate back into atoms. The new scientific materialists of the nineteenth century who straightforwardly declared themselves to be atheists were apt to fall back on elements of this ancient theory in corroboration of their own view, as does Ludwig Büchner, who, in an early defining chapter of *Kraft und Stoff*, 'Unsterblichkeit des Stoffs',<sup>7</sup> quotes from Democritus ('Aus nichts wird Nichts. Nichts, was ist, kann vernichtet werden') and Empedocles ('Diejenigen sind Kinder oder Leute mit engem Gesichtskreis, welche sich einbilden, daß irgend etwas entstände, was nicht vorher dagewesen war, oder daß irgendetwas gänzlich sterben oder untergehen könne') in support of his own statements on the subject:

Der Stoff als solcher ist unsterblich; unvernichtbar; kein Stäubchen im Weltall kann verlorengehen, keines hinzukommen (p. 20) . . . der Stoff [ist] unsterblich, und er [kann] daher auch nicht geschaffen sein. Wie könnte etwas geschaffen worden sein, das nicht vernichtet werden kann! Der Stoff muß ewig gewesen sein, ewig sein und ewig bleiben. . . . Die Physik lehrt, daß es nirgends einen leeren Raum gibt und auch niemals gegeben haben kann, während der Verstand die Ewigkeit des Raums als etwas Selbstverständliches hinzunehmen genöthigt ist. Daraus folgt nothwendig der Schluß, daß der Raum von Ewigkeit her mit Materie ausgefüllt gewesen sein muß, und daß also diese von Ewigkeit her vorhanden ist. Weiter folgt daraus, daß . . . die Welt keine gewordene sein kann. Ein Anfang oder Ende der Welt als solcher ist undenkbar und muß in das Reich spiritualistischer oder theologischer Träumereien verwiesen werden. (p.25)

Danton, in accepting the sway of the 'accursed phrase', does not accept as calmly as Ludwig Büchner the 'immortality of matter', nor does he accept as factually the relegation of the created universe to the realm of theological or spiritual fantasy. His whimsical personification of a creation which has so extended itself that nothing is empty any more – 'Alles voll Gewimmels' – is followed by a more brutal image of the filling-up of the void, elaborated with gruesome and melodramatic detail: 'Das Nichts hat sich ermordet, die Schöpfung ist seine Wunde, wir sind seine Blutstropfen, die Welt ist das Grab worin es fault.' What is an evident fact to Ludwig Büchner – that space has been filled through all eternity with matter – is much less evident in this hyperbolic image. For the latter implies, if one attempts to interpret it literally, that the material world indeed sprang from nothingness, but implies this rather incoherently, since one has no way of judging

how literally to take the personification of 'das Nichts', murdering itself and bringing about creation. Nothing, in this case, seems to have become something, slowly decaying in the world which it has created with its self-inflicted wound. Danton's own distinctly off-hand commentary, 'Das lautet verrückt, es ist aber doch was wahres daran', seems deliberately to suggest that the writer himself has not properly thought out the image.

Camille then echoes Danton's horror at the thought of not being able to die, in the sense of not being able to pass into nothingness: 'Die Welt ist der ewige Jude, das Nichts ist der Tod, aber er ist unmöglich. Oh nicht sterben können ...'. And Danton picks up Camille's idea of eternal life, tantamount to a living death, in another image of the world as a grave. This is not a continuation of the previous image – the world as the grave where nothingness is decaying – but an image of the world as the grave where human beings are buried alive: we are all buried alive, like kings buried in three or four coffins, one inside the other – the sky, our houses, our coats, our shirts – scratching for fifty years at our coffin lids, and without even the hope of ultimate annihilation. Again, it is the immortality of matter which robs him of that hope, and this image is more logical than the previous one, having an objective correlative in physiological fact: 'Da ist keine Hoffnung im Tod, er ist nur eine einfachere, das Leben eine verwickeltere, organisierte Fäulniß, das ist der ganze Unterschied.' Death is a simpler, life a more complicated form of decay. This is often regarded as the ultimate cynicism in Danton's view of life and death. Taken at face value, it certainly seems a part of what Peacock decries as 'the morbid reduction of things human and suprahuman to senseless corruption' (p. 184). It is, however, perhaps not sufficiently appreciated that the central concept of 'organized decay' could easily, in the nineteenth century, give rise to theories of life and death which were neither cynical nor pessimistic. Not only was it closely associated with the scientific materialist view of the indestructibility of matter – atheistic, certainly, and also quite optimistic and forward-looking<sup>8</sup> – but it could also quite readily be construed by nineteenth-century thinkers in a more pantheistic light in which immortal matter becomes equated with spirit. One can, for example, follow the progression of such thought, rather simply expressed, in Lorenz Oken's *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie*: he writes there, in numbered axioms:

- 2898 – Der Tod ist nur ein Fortwachsen durch Rückgang in den organischen Urstoff.
- 2899 – Der Tod ist ein organisiertes Faulen.
- 2900 – Es gibt keinen absoluten Tod.
- 2901 – Der Geist geht nie verloren. Er geht durch den Samen in das neue Geschöpf über.
- 2902 – Das Faulen ist ein Samenbilden.
- 2903 – Das Sterben ist ein Begatten.
- 2904 – Das Sterben ist die letzte wollüstige Handlung des Thiers. (Part III, pp. 218 f.)



It is not unreasonable to suppose that Büchner was by this time familiar with the work of Oken, or at the very least with his ideas and with similar ones. Büchner had, for example, been taught at Gießen by the physiologist J.B. Wilbrand, a convinced 'Naturphilosoph'.<sup>9</sup> The kind of speculation contained in Oken's axioms was certainly not new to him, and seems to be floating around in Danton's head in this passage, alongside atheist, materialist speculations on the same theme.<sup>10</sup>

Büchner is obviously not propounding here through Danton materialist ideas, calmly and optimistically, as did his brother a couple of decades later, any more than he is propagating a Romantic version of similar ideas, as did the 'Naturphilosoph' Lorenz Oken a couple of decades before. Danton's expressed reactions to the idea of indestructible matter are considerably less rational even than Oken's. They are quixotically emotional and nonsensical on any realistic level, implying on that level that Danton really believed that because 'matter' survived, human beings were robbed personally of peace in annihilation. Danton's earlier meditations on the subject in the 'Freies Feld' scene (II.4.39) do imply just that, that he has only a very slight hope that death will annihilate personal consciousness.<sup>11</sup> The materialist view that something can disintegrate but not disappear seems in this later passage to rob him of this hope altogether — which is anything but a rational materialist response. Even Oken's more Romantic notion of the survival of the spirit in death, the return to the 'Urstoff', hardly implies that anyone will be personally aware of it. It is on the other hand possible in Romantic poetry for the poet to derive some personal consolation from the idea itself, and it is perhaps to the idea that Danton is reacting rather than to any literal interpretation of it. One thinks of Wordsworth's description of his dead Lucy, 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, with rocks and stones and trees'. The consolation, if any, is in the poetic expression of the idea. One can perhaps say that Danton is veering rather wildly, in his reactions to immortal matter, between horror at the idea that annihilation is denied to him, and consolation at the idea that survival of a kind is guaranteed. He turns to the latter at the thought of Julie: 'O Julie! Wenn ich allein ginge! Wenn sie mich einsam ließe! Und wenn ich ganz zerfiel, mich ganz auflöste — ich wäre eine Handvoll gemarterten Staubes, jedes meiner Atome könnte nur Ruhe finden bey ihr.' The precise extent to which he is supposed to be expressing reactions to an abstract idea of immortality rather than to a literal belief in personal survival is not something to be clarified by lengthy speculation.

All this is very far from being a 'nihilist credo', or the rejection of such a credo. In no way is it a systematic argument. I cannot see in it the rather simple progression which, for example, Stern sees when he says that the Danton of this passage progresses from the nihilism of the opening sentences to its opposite, 'the assertion of the irreducible reality of existence' in the idea that nothingness has murdered itself; he comes to the conclusion that absolute solitude does not exist, his love for Julie being love in the face of death, an emotion as irreducible as was the assertion of existence. This Danton, Stern maintains, goes to the guillotine a

changed man, with bravado and a newly found loving care (Stern (1971), pp. 42 f.). Such an optimistic interpretation overlooks the quite specific intellectual issues with which Danton is wrestling in this scene, and the fact that he does not in any logical sense come to terms with them. He confronts them seriously, sometimes ironically, and 'resolves' them only in images which raise new questions. He is not coherently progressing anywhere; he leaps from the literal description of life and death as decaying organisms into the poetic notion that he and Julie will find peace together as atoms. But this is hardly a progression from nihilism to loving care. The closing image of martyred dust and peaceful atoms cannot be construed as an intellectual resolution of the questions of life and death raised in the passage as a whole. It is instantly followed in any case by his reluctance to enter in any real sense into the fantasy: 'Ich kann nicht sterben, nein, ich kann nicht sterben. Wir müssen schreien, sie müssen mir jeden Lebenstropfen aus den Gliedern reißen.'

This passage as a whole is fairly typical of the style of Danton's thought in the last acts of the play. One finds him again as death approaches, describing the body as a decaying physical organism, this time in much more revolting and deliberately cynical terms:

Das war der Mühe werth mich so groß zu füttern und mich warm zu halten. Bloß Arbeit für den Todtengräber! Es ist mir, als röch' ich schon. Mein lieber Leib, ich will mir die Nase zuhalten und mir einbilden du seyst ein Frauenzimmer, was vom Tanzen schwitzt und stinkt und dir Artigkeiten sagen. Wir haben uns sonst schon mehr miteinander die Zeit vertrieben. (IV.3.66)

This is one of those 'macabre images and defiantly cynical epitomizations to describe life' which Peacock describes as characteristic of Danton's 'extreme pessimism'. Danton is being 'shocking' again. Yet soon after this particularly revolting and largely gratuitous image of a stinking, sweating female, he is standing at the window and whispering his last words to Julie: 'Ich werde nicht allein gehn, ich danke dir Julie. Doch hätte ich anders sterben mögen, so ganz mühelos, so wie ein Stern fällt, wie ein Ton sich selbst aushaucht, sich mit ihren eignen Lippen todtküßt, wie ein Lichtstrahl in klaren Fluthen sich begräbt' (IV.3.67). These images of a peaceful death create the mood for his seeing the stars above him as shimmering tears: 'Wie schimmernde Thränen sind die Sterne durch die Nacht gesprengt, es muß ein großer Jammer in dem Aug seyn, von dem sie abträufelten'. Such passages as this have to be ignored by those who want to stress the 'Anti-poesie der kosmischen Natur' in Büchner, and to say that there is no 'Mondlyrik' in his picture of the world (Müller-Seidel, p.219). Danton seeks here, as before, his own consolation in a romantic image. It stands in great contrast to his earlier macabre image of his stinking decaying body, but there it is, side by side with the other, and equally valid as a momentary subjective reaction to the same situation. It is quite false, I believe, to construe one image as transcending the other – to suggest, for example, that Danton progresses here from an awareness of physical decay to a sense of a weeping being beyond the stars. Emotionally generated

images, poured out helter skelter as they are by Danton, do not cancel each other out, nor does one or the other have the 'last word'.

There is much discussion in Büchner criticism as to what in *Dantons Tod* has the last word, some arguing for example that nihilism has it, others that it has not.<sup>12</sup> Those who give the last word to nihilism usually point triumphantly to Danton's closing line in that series of images in which the Dantonists inveigh against the torturing gods in the last moments before they go to the guillotine: 'Die Welt ist das Chaos. Das Nichts ist der zu gebärende Weltgott' (IV.5.72).<sup>13</sup> They see this line as a culmination of Danton's earlier discussion of 'das Nichts' which we have just discussed. Helmut Krapp, arguing against a nihilist view of the play, points to the common identification of the two passages as being a fallacious one: 'Schon die gedankliche Identität der zweifellos sich entsprechenden Zitate ist fragwürdig, wenn man sie genau auf ihren Inhalt prüft. Auch bedeutet der letzte Gedanke nicht etwa die Fortentwicklung des ersten, da beide doch fast Gegensätzliches behaupten: der eine, daß das Nichts verfaule, der andere, daß es zu gebären sei.'<sup>14</sup> Of course, he is right. Together these two statements do not make much sense. But then, individually, they do not make much literal sense either. 'Das Nichts ist der zu gebärende Weltgott' is an image of an as yet unborn world-god with no more explicit a literal counterpart than the previous series of images of the torturing gods high above the earth, or the image of a weeping being beyond the stars. What does the 'Weltgott' image really tell us about 'das Nichts'? That Danton believes after all in the possibility of annihilation? But does he believe in the literal possibility of a 'Weltgott'? Obviously we have no idea, and it is faintly absurd to take this at best obscure image as Büchner's 'last word' in *Dantons Tod*, the ultimate expression of a 'nihilist' world-view. To do so is to adopt an attitude quite as biased in its way as Anneliese Bach's more frequently decried attempt to construe the image of death in Lucile's song in the closing scene

Es ist ein Schnitter, der heißt Tod,  
Hat Gewalt vom höchsten Gott (IV.9.75)

as Büchner's last word, the ultimate expression of his recognition of the reality of God.<sup>15</sup>

There is no 'nihilist philosophy' in *Dantons Tod*. The 'scattered statements' made by Danton on 'das Nichts' play their part alongside other statements in the speculations on life and death which run through the play. These statements do not add up to an intellectually coherent 'Weltanschauung', pessimistic, nihilistic, or otherwise, for Danton, nor yet for Georg Büchner. That they are Büchner's 'private' thoughts is clear. Certainly they derive very little from the historical Danton, and tend to be confusing as a set of ideas attributed to him. It is no doubt because of the resulting ambiguities in Danton's character that he has become the object of so much critical controversy, the kind of controversy, moreover, which rages as much around the person of the author as around the character himself.

Critics want, often quite emotionally, to claim Büchner, as it were, for their side, whatever that side may be. There are reasons for this, and one can scarcely make final statements on the character of Danton without taking a direct position on the vexed question of why the young Georg Büchner created the kind of Danton whom we find in the pages of *Dantons Tod*.

### 3. *Danton and Büchner*

Anyone contemplating Büchner's 'private Danton' against the background of Büchner's own life up to the writing of *Dantons Tod* is bound to ask the obvious question: why did this young political militant cast as the central character of his first play one of the great militant revolutionaries of recent history, and make of him such a blatantly unmilitant character? Much of the critical writing on *Dantons Tod* circles around this central question of motivation – Danton's motivation, and by extension, Büchner's. What is the reason for Danton's inaction, his willingness to die, his blasé cynicism, his pessimism? And if this whole complex of behaviour reflects, as is generally thought, Büchner's own, then what is the reason for it in his case? Answers to the question fall roughly into two groups depending on whether the writer takes on the one hand a philosophical or metaphysical view of *Dantons Tod*, or a sociological or political one on the other. It is, for example, a matter of some urgency to many writers to debate whether Danton's extreme pessimism derives from Büchner's philosophical or religious doubts, or from his disillusionment with revolutionary politics. This kind of either-or debate seems in the long run to be unproductive. Peacock, raising the question of the relationship between Büchner's 'Weltschmerz' and his political views, comments:

One turns, for instruction, to the literature of the subject and though one finds much helpful information and illuminating comment, one remains aware of an oppressive, unresolved problem, seen most clearly in the way critical views, falling roughly into two groups, the metaphysical and the sociological, are too deliberately opposed to each other, too exclusive, too intent on a unitary system of thought in one direction or the other. (pp. 181 f.)

This 'oppressive unresolved problem' is seen very clearly, one might almost say crassly, in the directly opposing views of Viëtor and Lukács, Viëtor taking the extreme 'metaphysical' position. 'Eine große religiöse Wahrheit aufzuzeigen, ist Büchners dichterisches Anliegen', he writes, hotly attacking Treitschke's nineteenth-century right-wing condemnation of Büchner as an advocate of violent social revolution. Viëtor insists that *Dantons Tod* has 'keine aktivistische Tendenz; es verherrlicht nicht die französische Revolution und überhaupt keine Revolution',<sup>16</sup> only to find himself attacked equally hotly from the political left by Lukács, who proceeds in turn to call on the unlikely support of Treitschke ('der altmodische Reaktionär') and his recognition of 'das Revolutionäre' in Büchner's work, insisting that 'Büchner ist stets ein konsequenter Revolutionär gewesen' and that fascist distortion has been applied to interpret 'das Revolutionäre' out of Büchner's life

and work (Lukács, in Martens (1965), pp.197 and 201). This well-known example of right-left battling over the body of Büchner belongs, of course, to the thirties, but the 'oppressive unresolved problem' has by no means faded away in the writings of the sixties and seventies. Büchner's overwhelming concern is still seen by some critics to be with religious and metaphysical problems, and by others with political and economic ones. The polemic which renders these two sets of concerns mutually exclusive goes on.<sup>17</sup> Yet to the uninvolved observer, this facet of Büchner criticism surely does little more than bear out the unpolemical point made by Peacock when he mildly suggests that there is something in the 'intermezzo which Büchner contributed to German dramatic literature to which in fact both kinds of listeners, the sociologists and the metaphysically minded, may respond' (p. 182).

This seemingly common-sense attitude is quite uncommonly encountered in Büchner criticism, though it is borne out by such facts as we know of Büchner's life and interests: he was interested in philosophy, literature, science, and history as well as the practical politics of revolution, and it is doubtful that he would have drawn sharp lines between these interests in theory any more than he draws sharp lines between them in practice in *Dantons Tod*. The known events of his life, the written record of his thoughts, the testimony of those who knew him – these are not such that one can deduce from them a comprehensive philosophy of life; documentation is meagre and his life was in any case too short. As a young student, he was a political revolutionary, actively involved in underground attempts to sow sedition among the peasants of Hesse. This we know for a fact. That he was saddened and in some sense disillusioned by the failure of these attempts, we can reasonably assume.<sup>18</sup> Cut short in his political career by the authorities' early seizure of the *Hessische Landbote*, he returned to his father's house for a few months, wrote *Dantons Tod* and, hard on its heels, fled the country. There is no record in his own hand of what was on his mind during these crucial few months except *Dantons Tod* itself.<sup>19</sup> To write, as does Claude David, 'Während er *Dantons Tod* schrieb, ist er bereits unterwegs, sich endgültig vom politischen Kampf abzuwenden'<sup>20</sup> is to state something one cannot possibly know. 'Endgültig' is in any case a strong word to use of a twenty-one year old; there is no way of judging how he would have developed politically or otherwise if he had lived beyond the age of twenty-three. The facts, such as they are, are against David: while in Darmstadt at this time he was meeting secretly with a group of young men with whom he had formed the previous Easter a new branch of the 'Gesellschaft der Menschenrechte',<sup>21</sup> and remarks in his later letters from Strasbourg indicate that he never ceased to hope for a day when the bankrupt political systems of Europe would be overthrown.<sup>22</sup> Anger at the suffering of the poor, rage against those in power, as well as impatience with the liberal elements which strove futilely against them – these crop up frequently in his letters.<sup>23</sup> This does not make him 'ein konsequenter Revolutionär', but it leaves room for the possibility of his becoming an active revolutionary again.

No amount of argument on the subject can bring us closer to the 'truth' of whether Büchner had or had not become permanently disillusioned by revolutionary politics by the time he wrote *Dantons Tod*. Whatever one may deduce or imagine from his letters and other writings, however, there is little argument with the fact that the Danton whom he created was anything but a consistent revolutionary, and this is a fact which many critics have quite legitimately sought to explain. That side of Danton which Peacock regards as caricature, 'the Danton of "Langeweile", of the nihilistic world-chaos', has from the time of the play's first publication, made it difficult for readers to accept Büchner's Danton as a serious portrait of a serious revolutionary. One has a certain sympathy with the scepticism of that early critic of *Dantons Tod*, Julian Schmidt, who wrote in the 1850s: 'Eine Revolution heraufbeschwören aus Langeweile und Blasiertheit!! Hamlet-Leonce an der Spitze eines Jacobinerclubs kommt uns vor wie Nero, als er Rom anzündete, um einen schauerlich schönen Anblick zu haben!'.<sup>24</sup>

It is in the attempt to understand this paradoxical character, the bored, blasé revolutionary leader, that critics have stepped in and divided into two camps, some using the 'Langeweile und Blasiertheit' to argue that Büchner was not particularly interested in Danton, the revolutionary, but rather in Danton, the despairing human being. Any equation of this 'Langeweile und Blasiertheit' with a kind of Romantic 'Weltschmerz' is particularly resented on the other side by those critics whose main interest is in Büchner, the revolutionary. Hans Mayer argues, with much justice, that Büchner himself did not enter into political conspiracies 'aus romantischer Laune'; it was not to deaden the inner boredom of a Byronic hero that he organized secret societies, held tactical discussions with Weidig, and studied the role of the 'material factor' in the revolutionary movement.<sup>25</sup> Danton's 'Untätigkeit und Todesbereitschaft' springs from another source, not from the reading of Romantic literature but from Büchner's own experience of revolutionary politics and his study of the French Revolution. Mayer's explanation of this is much more subtle than that of writers who see Danton as an expanded version of Thiers's Danton, a politician who tires of the fight when he sees that he is fighting a losing battle. Mayer sees clearly enough that Büchner's Danton is quite different from Thiers's Danton, and finds in this difference itself an explanation for the 'espèce de sommeil' which Büchner creates for his character. The historical Danton, in Mayer's view, failed in his attempt to overthrow Robespierre's programme of continued revolution with his own concrete political programme of stabilization. He failed because he sought to obstruct the revolutionary movement, whose continuance was objectively necessary, as Robespierre and St Just recognized. His own former supporters and allies, the Jacobins and Cordeliers, were bound to reject his programme, and he found himself, perhaps against his will and unconsciously, the spokesman of profiteers and counter-revolutionaries. The historical Danton was aware only of the failure of his politics and did not distance himself from politics through boredom and disgust. Büchner's Danton, by contrast, is

fully conscious of the whole process of the Revolution, thanks to Büchner's own historical hindsight, and is, as it were, *a priori* disgusted with it. Büchner knows the end of the story, the events of Thermidor; he knows that Robespierre and St Just will also fail. It is not Danton's downfall, but the failure of the Revolution which stands, for Mayer, at the centre of Büchner's play – its failure, that is, to solve the material problem of the people: 'Die Nutznießer und Gewinner der Revolution genießen . . . aber das Volk hungert' (p. 199). Robespierre, right as he was in principle, could not solve these problems, because of insuperable deficiencies in human nature which surrounded him. Büchner's own political experience, as well as his study of the French Revolution, had led him to believe that the mechanism of history always worked in favour of the 'Geldaristokratie': for him, then, the failure of the French Revolution was inevitable. This recognition kept his Danton from continuing the political struggle with Robespierre and St Just because not only his struggle but also theirs seemed to Büchner pointless. It is Büchner's own 'isolierende Erkenntnis' which he imparts to his Danton. That Mayer himself considers Büchner to have been mistaken in his analysis of the historical situation, in that Büchner did not realize that the events of the Revolution were 'rein historisch bedingt' and not in any larger sense inevitable, is, whether one agrees with him or not, an indication of a sense of proportion in his analysis: he does not imbue Büchner uncritically with his own historical perceptions. His view of Büchner's Danton is one of the most convincing attempts to account for Danton's extreme pessimism in political terms; certainly, as far as I am concerned, he carries his basic point that Büchner's own after-the-fact view of the failure of the French Revolution, as well as his own recent experience of failure as a revolutionary, contribute strongly to his characterization of a Danton who is stultified by his sense of the futility of political struggle. If Mayer's analysis ultimately fails to satisfy, it is largely because he limits himself too severely to political terms alone. Mayer makes no bones about this: 'Problematik, Stoffwahl und Leitideen des Danton sind aus den Erfahrungen und dem politischen Schicksal des revolutionären Theoretikers und Praktikers Büchner, und nur aus ihnen, zu verstehen' (p. 184). It is difficult to see why one should insist on the emphatic limitation 'und nur aus ihnen'. Büchner, even at the age of twenty-one, had had other experiences than political ones; he had pursued other studies and thought other thoughts than political ones; his experience of 'human nature' had been gained in other spheres than political ones. Why should these other thoughts, studies, and experiences not throw light on the 'Problematik, Stoffwahl und Leitideen' of his first play?

Mayer's self-imposed limitation forces him to consider all the various aspects of Danton's behaviour, not only his 'Untätigkeit und Todesbereitschaft', as arising specifically from his political disillusionment. Danton seeks meaning in sensual pleasure, for example, because of his insight into the meaninglessness of political action; his 'Epicureanism', his theory that the virtue of Robespierre or the self-sacrifice of Christ are forms of 'Triebbefriedigung' is an *ad hoc* construction, a

consequence of his evaluation of the political situation. That Büchner might well have constructed this theory, or alternatively, explored this notion in the light of other experiences and readings of his young life – readings as diverse as Epicurus, Spinoza, and Magendie, to mention only a few possibilities – and not necessarily have measured it very carefully at all against his construction of the events of the French Revolution, seems to me quite arguable. Yet this possibility is easily missed if one is looking solely to politics to rescue Danton from the stigma of frivolity attached to him by such writers as Schmidt. At the end of his analysis, Mayer writes: ‘Wie weit ab ist das alles von den üblichen Vergleichen des Büchnerschen Danton mit dem Leonce oder gar irgendeinem romantischen Weltschmerz-dandy’ (p. 206). It is ‘weit ab’, and perhaps rather too much so. It diminishes unnecessarily some important facets of *Dantons Tod* and of Büchner’s own personality – an unabashed pleasure in the natural, the sensual side of human experience, for example, and an admittedly adolescent desire to shock his elders with the expression of it, as well as an enjoyment of intermittent sophisticated posturing, amusing and perhaps frivolous, but nothing for which a young man should have to apologize.

The only critic who has devoted an entire work to the more frivolous side of Büchner is R. Gunkel in *Georg Büchner und der Dandysmus*, a work which has been either ignored in subsequent criticism or dismissed in more or less scathing footnotes. It does not present a very convincing interpretation of Büchner’s life and work, mainly because of a certain naiveté of thought and style which tends to invite ridicule.<sup>26</sup> Yet Gunkel’s emphasis on Büchner’s having been an ‘anpassungsfähiger Gefühlsmensch’ is no more reprehensible in its way than other more commonly accepted exclusive emphases, on Büchner as a political being, or as a despairing being. Gunkel’s exclusive stress cannot really be substantiated in the light of Büchner’s overall life and works, and his conclusion that he was an ‘angehender Dandy’ who was born in the wrong times is not a very productive one (p. 95). Nevertheless, the ‘Dandyzüge’ which he sees in *Dantons Tod* and in *Leonce and Lena* are present. He sees what is there to see. Other critics, looking for something else, ignore them. Danton, particularly in the early part of the play, revels in sophisticated posturing in front of his friends. He also enjoys sex and obscenity: ‘er genießt’, sometimes bawdily, sometimes beautifully. So does his circle of friends. One thinks of Camille and his exuberant, unlikely politics – ‘Ach, die gliederlösende, böse Liebe!’ – of the ‘clever’ banter and cross-talk between them all, Danton, Camille, Lacroix, Hérault, right up to their last moments. Büchner surely enjoys all this himself. Why else should there be so much of it in a play with an ostensibly sombre theme?

One cannot find much in the recorded events of his life to support Gunkel’s contention that Büchner was a ‘Genußmensch’, certainly not in the sense of a bawdy ‘Genießer’. The only direct indication which Gunkel can find of any specifically ‘frivolous’ enjoyment on the part of Büchner himself is a comment in one of



his last letters: 'Jeden Abend sitz' ich eine oder zwei Stunden im Casino; du kennst meine Vorliebe für schöne Säle, Lichter und Menschen um mich',<sup>27</sup> a seldom quoted comment which again Gunkel sees because he is open to it. There is some sense in the letters to and from Büchner's student friends in Strasbourg, Boeckel and the Stöbers, of a close circle of male friends, with in-jokes and banter and genuine affection.<sup>28</sup> That Büchner is much attracted by the idea of a group of witty, sophisticated, sensual young revolutionaries is clear from the gusto with which he presents them in *Dantons Tod*. It is equally clear that his own experience of conspiratorial politics were rather different. One hardly pictures his meeting with the highly respectable Pastor Weidig and his friends, even including the eccentric proletarian Becker, as being the scene of sophisticated word-games, witty epigrams, or pleas for 'die gliederlösende böse Liebe'. His earlier schoolboy politics, however, when he and the young Minnigerode and their friends were wont to address each other with 'Bon jour, citoyen', were quite possibly filled with a whole variety of fantasies of the Parisian revolutionaries.<sup>29</sup>

At the time when he wrote *Dantons Tod*, he had just undergone a severe shock. The close friend of his boyhood, Minnigerode, was in gaol, as far as he knew in chains in a dungeon, facing mental and physical torture, if not death. Büchner himself, while engaging with others in rather fantastic plans to free him,<sup>30</sup> was in fact making quite real plans to flee the country and leave him to his fate. It was after all Büchner the ringleader who had written with Weidig the *Hessische Landbote*, not Minnigerode, and he never did publicly admit to this, any more than Minnigerode ever betrayed him. Guilt on this score would hardly have been misplaced. The character whom he creates at the centre of his play, a man who decides *not* to flee, who with a show of carelessness chooses death in his country with his friends, was perhaps some manner of 'Wunschtraum' on Büchner's part: Danton's early swaggering bravado, his carelessness of death, his brash attempts at diminishing the importance of death, his own and that of others, might well have been the young Büchner's outlet for bravado, for sounding cavalier about prospects which terrified him, for himself and for his friends. This is, of course, pure conjecture, but in remembering that the writer of *Dantons Tod* was a very young man, we might remind ourselves that his first play is much more likely to be one in which he tries himself out in various roles than one in which he presents a ready-made philosophy of life to the world.

Certainly his letters of this period show him doing some very obvious role-playing. *Dantons Tod* just behind him, free at last of his father's house, and suffering the usual mixed feelings at this particular freedom, he writes to his family, en route to Strasbourg, on 9 March 1835:

Es liegt jetzt Alles in meiner Hand. Ich werde das Studium der medicinisch-philosophischen Wissenschaften mit der größten Anstrengung betreiben, und auf *dem* Feld ist noch Raum genug, um etwas Tüchtiges zu leisten und unsere Zeit ist grade dazu gemacht, dergleichen anzuerkennen. Seit ich über der Grenze bin,

habe ich frischen Lebensmuth, ich stehe jetzt ganz allein, aber gerade das steigert meine Kräfte. (II, 436)

Within days of this assurance of honest endeavour, he is to be found striking a quite different note about his future in a blasé missive to his new-found literary friend and benefactor, Gutzkow: to him he writes, before the end of March, from Strasbourg:

Meine Zukunft ist so problematisch, daß sie mich selbst zu interessieren anfängt, was viel heißen will. Zu dem subtilen Selbstmord durch *Arbeit* kann ich mich nicht leicht entschließen; ich hoffe, meine Faulheit wenigstens ein Vierteljahr lang fristen zu können, und nehme dann Handgeld entweder von den Jesuiten für den Dienst der Maria oder von den St. Simonisten für die *femme libre*, oder sterbe mit meiner Geliebten. Wir werden sehen. (II, 436)

Is he deliberately lying to one or other of these correspondents? Of course not. When he is writing to his parents, he feels like a dutiful son, and having brought so much misery upon his family, he wants very badly to make it up to them by fulfilling their expectations in at least one sense. He is, in any case, genuinely interested in 'medizinisch-philosophische Wissenschaften', as his subsequent scientific achievements show, and he is quite astute in recognizing it as an up-and-coming field. When he writes to Gutzkow, he feels like a sophisticated devil-may-care writer, careless of practicalities and disinclined to the subtle suicide of work. He is after all a sophisticated young writer – he has just written *Dantons Tod*, and had its merits recognized by the 'notorious' Gutzkow. He is rather pleased with himself, and enjoys this languid bohemian role. He convinces Gutzkow quite nicely, who writes to him a couple of months later, after some further exchange of correspondence: 'Sie haben selbst viel Ähnlichkeit mit Ihrem Danton: genial und träge.'<sup>31</sup> One imagines that Büchner would have enjoyed this. 'Träge!' – the young man who between January 1835 and January 1837 brought his scientific studies to the point of a doctorate, researched and wrote a treatise in comparative anatomy, translated two French plays for publication, prepared himself to teach courses in comparative anatomy and in philosophy, and took up a teaching position, all this alongside the complications of his private life, estrangement from his father, exile from his own country, engagement to be married, guilt for having deserted his friends and fellow-conspirators, and constant worries about money, and about his financial and professional future. At the same time, of course, he also wrote at least three plays and a short *Novelle*. He was hardly, in any literal sense, 'idle' – but the young man who wrote that letter to Gutzkow, who elaborated on Danton's 'espèce de sommeil', who wrote a whole 'Lustspiel der Langeweile', this was also a quite real Georg Büchner, as real as the dedicated young scientist, and both these Büchners fade too much into the background if one sets one's sights too exclusively on either the determined young revolutionary or the disillusioned young revolutionary.

Georg Büchner was one person, and one can easily provide, as I have done, a rough-and-ready psychological explanation for the two faces which he presented, for example, to Gutzkow on the one hand and to his parents on the other. Because one can in this way account for some of the faces which he shows in *Danton*, it does not follow that *Danton* himself is a psychologically coherent character. Büchner was – one can hardly repeat it often enough – a very young man, and *Danton* was his first major dramatic character, and a very ambitious one at that. He enthusiastically imposed various postures of his own on an already massive historical figure. The word ‘posture’ is not intended to imply any lack of sincerity; it is a way of describing rather the distinct modes in which a young man sought to deal with himself and the rest of the world. They did not all match all contexts, even in his own life. In *Dantons Tod*, they explode on to the page into the emotion-laden atmosphere of the French Revolution, and cannot possibly be plausibly accounted for within the narrow framework of the last days of *Danton*. The sophisticated young *literateur* who enjoyed his languid self-mockery in letters to Gutzkow found a flamboyant outlet in *Danton*. So did the young man who, in other different letters, expressed a bitter anguish at the human condition, quite unchecked by self-irony.<sup>32</sup> So did the young revolutionary, newly and sincerely cast down by his first attempts and failures in the political arena. So did the serious young student, his head full of recent reading in history and philosophy, of his early encounters with modern scientific views of man and the world, and of his own early experiences in anatomy laboratories.

One can understand better what Büchner’s characters are actually saying if one views them thus in the light of Büchner’s own flexible personality, his own wide interests. *Danton* is a larger-than-life stage figure, and when he is played by a flamboyant and versatile actor, he can sweep an audience along with him by the force of his language and the exciting ebb and flow of his emotions. But those of us who are sitting back quietly and analysing the play can see more clearly the issues with which Büchner, budding poet, political activist, and scientist, was grappling if we stop trying to make sense of *Danton* as one of a cast of coherently delineated and motivated characters. We can then respond much more directly to the undercurrent of thought which runs through *Dantons Tod*, largely untrammelled by considerations of individual characterization.

## CONCLUSION

### THE UNDERCURRENT OF BÜCHNER'S THOUGHT

Individual issues stand out most clearly in the action and setting of *Dantons Tod* as preoccupations of Büchner himself when a minor character such as Marion or Thomas Payne steps briefly into the spotlight to express at length certain feelings and ideas which have, on the face of it, nothing to do with the 'theme of the play' – that is, with the struggle to the death between Danton and Robespierre, between the revolutionaries and the new moderates. It is readily recognized that such feelings and ideas are pouring straight from the mind and pen of the writer, unfiltered by concern for any supposed role being played by this minor character in an overall pattern of character and setting. Such speeches tend to be openly regarded as digressions or interludes – thus Marion's digression on her own sexual life (by Knight: see p. 16 above), and Payne's interlude on the non-existence of God (by Mayer: see p. 75 f. above).

Less obvious is such an outpouring in the case of a character such as St Just, who is more developed than Marion or Payne, who appears more often, and who has some plausibility as a dramatic version of his historical counterpart. When one draws back, however, and asks, as we have tried to do, whether his speech before the Convention really makes psychological sense as the expression of St Just's ideas at that time and in that setting – whether it is, in other words, a deepening of the historical St Just – then one sees that the St Just who speaks before the Convention is perhaps a different, 'added' St Just, that his speech can be read as one reads Marion's or Thomas Payne's, as a 'digression' or 'interlude', directly expressing speculations of Büchner's own.

Turning to the central and more complicated character of Danton, however, with these three 'digressions' in mind, one sees at once that he at one time or another in the play expresses ideas similar to some of those contained in all three, sometimes in more or less identical language. Is one then to say that Danton's expressions of these ideas are also Büchner's personal digressions from the 'main theme' of the play? When Danton says, for example, with Marion and Payne, 'Jeder handelt seiner Natur gemäß',<sup>1</sup> or when he suggests, as does St Just, that men are instruments in the hands of spirits,<sup>2</sup> or when he exhibits the indifference of St Just to the fate of the masses, 'Ob sie nun an der Guillotine oder am Fieber oder am Alter sterben?',<sup>3</sup> or when he expresses the anger of Thomas Payne

at the notion that the pain of men is attributable to God?<sup>4</sup> In the face of all this, it is simply not very useful to talk in terms of 'digressions' or 'interludes' at all.

It seems to make more sense to talk in terms of what I have called an undercurrent of thought running through the play – not in the sense that underlying the action is a coherent 'philosophy' or a 'Weltanschauung', but that weaving its way in and out of the action, of the events of Danton's last days, is an undercurrent of serious speculation on the meaning of these events, and, more grandly (because Büchner is indulging here in speculations on a grand scale), on the meaning of these events in general on the human stage. The question so often treated in the secondary literature as to whether Büchner is concerned with metaphysical or with sociological aspects of human existence pales into irrelevance once one grasps that his concern is with the phenomenon of the human being, a physical entity, a social animal, a thinking being. How, he seems to be asking from the beginning of *Dantons Tod*, are we to explain this phenomenon called man? How are we to explain the things he does, the societies he creates, the way he passes his time and deals with his fellow man?

To understand the set of his mind in raising such questions, it is important to see that for him, the physical, anatomical reality of man is a starting-point. Not only was Büchner at the time of writing *Dantons Tod* a student of medicine, of anatomy and physiology, but he had been brought up in the house of a doctor. Ernst Büchner was, it should be emphasized, not a routine medical practitioner, but a 'free-thinking' scientist in his own right who conducted experiments on animals (in the days, be it said, before anaesthetics) and had an anatomical laboratory in his own house.<sup>5</sup> Young Georg undoubtedly had in his mind's eye from an early age much stronger literal images of anatomical reality than most of us have. When Danton uses images of brain fibres and intestines in his questions about human relationships,<sup>6</sup> such medical background is obvious, and frequently referred to by critics. Less obvious, perhaps, is the strong and formative influence of such images in the mind of the writer, a pervasive force behind many other statements which do not allude directly to physical organs at all. Because this is seldom recognized for what it is, there is a tendency to regard the whole train of thought in Büchner's work which deals with man as animal, the body as organism, the dominance of physical urges, as a form of cynical reductionism, when in my opinion it is better regarded as a foundation of physical fact, on which any and all speculations on the nature of man have to be built.

A rarely quoted note in Büchner's hand comes to mind in this connexion: it was scribbled across a blank registration form, apparently from the University of Gießen, and reads: 'Boire sans soif et faire l'amour tout le temps, il n'y a que ce qui nous distingue des autres bêtes. Georg Büchner.' This is cited only in a footnote in Bergemann's 1922 edition, where he describes it as 'eine andere Äußerung Büchners ..., durch deren bittere Ironie ja auch ein gewisser Bekenntniswert hindurchblickt'.<sup>7</sup> This is an example of the way in which something which might

well have been to Büchner a straightforward statement of a certain limited kind of physical fact is read by someone with a different set of mind as an utterance of bitter irony. The emphasis running through *Dantons Tod* on people's acting 'according to their nature', their main motivating force being pleasure and pain – this too is often read as bitterness, cynicism, a reduction of the human to the animal, a despairing response to the absence of God or to the failure of political man. Yet the critic who avoids reading it as a reaction, as a final bitter response to anything, can see it more clearly as a beginning, a serious source of speculation. G.A.Wells, for example, is surely right when he says: 'Danton's allegation that nothing is either good or evil is not mere cynicism, but a standpoint not without interest to and relevance for those of us who are not disillusioned cynics; and this is something that greatly widens the appeal of the play' (p. 108).

One needs to grasp that Büchner's speculations on man start from the firmest base he knows, that of physical reality. That, the reality of pleasure and pain, of instincts and physical drives, is 'given'. Various characters in *Dantons Tod*, as we have seen, refer to it in different ways. It answers some questions about human behaviour, but not all. It provides a basis for understanding why Robespierre is virtuous, or Marion promiscuous, but it does not answer for Danton the question of the extent of his responsibility for atrocities perpetrated on his fellow men. Is there another force larger than individual physical drives which directs, perhaps blindly, the events of history, events which seem to the individual to be 'caused' by men themselves? St Just continues this speculation: his starting-point is also physical reality, that of the physical world, obeying inexorable natural laws of change, with not the slightest regard for human life. The purposelessness, from man's point of view, of natural processes, is again no 'answer' to many of life's questions. It is, as Büchner later implies in his lecture on the nerves of the skull, the point at which for some thinkers questions really begin. St Just himself turns to the notion of a World Spirit driving through natural and social history, and Payne and the prisoners in the Luxembourg argue out the pros and cons of the traditional explanation of this force behind the world, the creator-father God. Danton, rejecting such a God, accepting in theory the view of man as material being, plays with notions of the immortality of matter and what this means to the individual consciousness. The Dantonists, facing death at the end of the play, rage against the pain of the human condition, against the forces which might be responsible for it, yet oblivious to it. They return at the same time to their assertions that human beings themselves invent the attitudes to life which are most comfortable to them. People, says Camille, invent their own 'fixed ideas', and call them common sense; the happiest man of all was one who avoided the boredom of common sense and invented the fixed idea that he was the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>8</sup> This kind of assertion, taken seriously, undercuts the objective validity of any idea which any character might put forward, and it should be taken seriously. Büchner's characters are seriously tormented by the constant nagging suspicion that all of

life's activities are, at base, 'Zeitvertreib'; ideas are invented, religions created, work devised, all to pass the time, to fill lives which are essentially purposeless.

To understand Büchner's thought, one has to take together this whole complex of speculation which I have just outlined and treat each idea equally seriously and in conjunction with the others. It is almost impossible to do this in the actual context of *Dantons Tod*. What is in fact a quite devastating commentary on human life – for example, the suggestion that human activities are a way of passing the time – is bound to seem inappropriate and merely frivolous when a Danton, in the midst of other people's life-and-death crises, talks of his boredom, of unhappiness as a way of breaking the monotony of life. The undercurrent of speculation on man and the world which I have described flows through the highly charged events of the play, and one cannot but respond to it piecemeal in the context. One can, for example, amidst the horrors of the French Revolution, respond seriously to the idea that blind forces may be causing this human havoc; one can feel, quite readily, anger against the gods, existing or not. But there is a strong inclination to regard as either frivolous or cynical the idea that virtue and vice are relative, that everyone is seeking pleasure or avoiding pain, reiterated as it is in that violent atmosphere where pleasure was rare, pain was real, and people were holding on to principles for grim death. 'Je ne puis altérer les principes', wrote the prisoner Riouffe, 'ils sont éternels et indestructibles ... la vérité ne connaît point l'amnistie' (p. 3). One does not have to read such statements of belief in absolute standards, the calls to virtue and the condemnation of vice in the memoirs of the Revolution, to react instinctively against statements of the relativity of moral standards in such a well-known emotive setting of human heroism and villainy. It is not without reason that many critics write off this whole train of thought in *Dantons Tod* as reactive and incidental. It is incidental to the hour-by-hour events of the terrible days before the death of Danton. Nevertheless it is seminal to Büchner's thinking, contributing to his sense of human activities as 'Zeitvertreib', and it needs to be read in conjunction with strands of thought in the play which are regularly treated as serious speculation – thoughts of God, of fate, of man's responsibility for his actions.

It is pointless, in dealing with Büchner's thought, to try to separate the physical from the metaphysical. Questions about one involve questions about the other. Pointless, too, to say that *Dantons Tod* is not a 'political' play because it deals with 'philosophical' matters. Obviously Büchner was concerned with politics, with society, with injustice, with poverty. Obviously he wanted economic and social change. And equally obviously when he stepped back and looked at the course of cosmic, organic, and social history, he had to ask the difficult question of what the role of the individual really was in all this. He saw man the animal with his powerful physical drives, he saw the physical world with its inexorable natural laws, and he saw the history of human society, with its shifts in ideologies and systems. This did not make him less aware of human suffering and human injustice on an individual

scale. The cosmic view did not make him less moved by the shivering ragged children staring longingly at the tawdry tinsel toys in the Strasbourg Christmas Fair, nor less enraged at the thought that 'für die meisten Menschen auch die armseligsten Genüsse und Freuden unerreichbare Kostbarkeiten sind'.<sup>9</sup> Because he could create with sympathy a character like Marion, because he could see the events of natural and social history from the viewpoint of his St Just, he was no less aware of the plight of the poor whose hunger whored and begged, no less moved by the individual death-agony of Danton and Camille, by the personal devastation of bereavement in Lucile. He had to try and live with his two kinds of awareness, and grapple with the paradoxes which such a double awareness creates. This is what he was doing, improvising explosively as he went along, in *Dantons Tod*.

He was still doing it two short years later in the months before his death when he was working on *Woyzeck*. While *Woyzeck* remained unfinished, it is not improvised in the same sense as *Dantons Tod*. One can this time, looking at the three drafts of the play and the fragments,<sup>10</sup> see the playwright directing more consciously the undercurrent of his speculation on the phenomenon of the human being which we have seen flowing almost uncontrollably through *Dantons Tod*. There are voices in *Woyzeck* which cry out in a kind of chorus his own basic questions. These voices are not integrated into a final text, and one cannot be absolutely sure who would ultimately have pronounced their words,<sup>11</sup> but one is conscious of the young Büchner, phrasing and rephrasing them, looking for and perhaps finding the perfect context for them. The 'Marktschreier', displaying his performing horse in the first scenes which Büchner committed to paper, calls to his fairground audience: 'Das hat geheiße: Mensch sey natürlich. Du bist geschaffe Staub, Sand, Dreck. Willst du mehr seyn, als Staub, Sand, Dreck?' (I,145 f.). The barber in the inn, a couple of scenes later, echoes these words with his own version of the question: 'Was ist der Mensch? Knochen! Staub, Sand, Dreck. Was ist die Natur? Staub, Sand, Dreck' (I,149 f.). Parts of the barber's drunken speech are rewritten in the second group of scenes, and are spoken now by drunken 'Handwerksburschen' in an unidentified setting: crudely, parodistically, one of them poses the question of the purpose of man, and answers himself with what is essentially a travesty of a teleological explanation of man's creation: 'Warum hat Gott die Mensche geschaffe? Das hat auch sei Nutz. Was würde der Landmann, der Schuhmacher, der Schneider anfangen, wenn er für die Mensche kei Schuh, kei Hose machte? Warum hat Gott den Mensche das Gefühl der Schamhaftigkeit eingeflößt? Damit der Schneider lebe kann. Ja! Ja! – Darum! auf daß! damit! . . .' (I, 159 f.) What is man? Why was he created? The 'reasons' given by the 'Handwerksbursche' are cruelly, deliberately absurd.

The questions themselves are pared down in the last version, the 'vorläufige Reinschrift', and this time brilliantly set in the inn where Marie is dancing with the 'Tambourmajor' and juxtaposed therefore with the personal torment of Woyzeck, who is watching through the window. The loud voices of the 'Handwerks-



burschen' weave drunkenly around the stifled words of Woyzeck whose agony of jealousy is drowned out by the mock sermon preached from the table of the inn. Yet the tiny personal voice of Woyzeck's individual suffering lingers in the mind as the 'Handwerksbursche' poses expansively the massive impersonal question: 'Warum ist der Mensch? Warum ist der Mensch?' (I, 178), and gives the same drunken travesty of an answer as before.

At the end of his short life, Büchner is still grappling with his double awareness, responding to individual pain and pleasure with passion, while his intellect looks over his own shoulder, formulating and reformulating questions. This process, which one sees clearly enough as he works towards a final version of *Woyzeck*, also lies behind the manifold perspectives of the rapidly written *Dantons Tod*. These perspectives are not altogether co-ordinated into the total dramatic framework; hence the confusion which has so often arisen regarding the characters and their motives, the author and his motives. In his next three literary works, *Lenz*, *Leonce und Lena*, and *Woyzeck*, Büchner isolates more carefully aspects of this 'undercurrent of thought' and explores them more coherently through characters who make sense in their settings, whose personalities and preoccupations are in keeping with the overall atmosphere of each work. Each shows more signs of artistic polish, certainly more unity, than Büchner's first play, but he is still a young man with an inquiring mind who is asking questions about his characters rather than providing answers through them. It is perhaps not least because of the undisciplined enthusiasm with which he does this in his first experiment with drama, because of its rough edges and its many question-marks, that we, as critics, continue to return in fascination to *Dantons Tod* with our own questions and answers about its elusive characters, its impassioned confrontation with a profusion of massive ideas.

## NOTES

### NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Peacock, pp. 181-84. (For the full titles and publication details of works referred to in abbreviated form in these Notes, see the Bibliography.)
2. Hermann Pongs refers thus to Peacock, 'ein pragmatischer Engländer', in his introduction to the recent publication of Frida Pongs-Andersson's 1916 dissertation, *Die Tragödie Georg Büchners*, in this case with positive connotation.
3. Knapp (1975), p. 127: 'Sowohl Peacock wie auch andere angelsächsische Kritiker bemängeln, und das hier ebenfalls mit Sengle, die Heterogenität des Dramas.' See Sengle, pp. 132-34.
4. Compare Knapp (1975), p. 102: 'Zu Fragen der Personencharakterisierung, der situativen und motivischen Gegebenheiten innerhalb der Werke fehlen Einzelanalysen größeren Stils.'
5. Werner R. Lehmann very helpfully presents them thus in his edition, Vol. I, pp. 436-483.
6. Viëtor (1933), pp. 357-79. The historical sources identified and generally accepted at that time were Thiers's and Mignet's histories of the French Revolution, Strahlheim's popular compilation *Unsere Zeit*, Riouffe's *Mémoires d'un Détenue*, and Mercier's *Le Nouveau Paris*. (For full details, see the Bibliography, under Historical Sources.)
7. Viëtor (1949), p. 118.
8. Thieberger, pp. 34-52.
9. Beck, pp. 346-93: Beck considers the bulk of the sources to have been assembled by Viëtor and Thieberger, but thinks they can be supplemented. Proceeding from the assumption that Büchner might well have read the letters of Camille Desmoulins to his wife (this based, for example, on imagery in *Dantons Tod*, IV.4.68 f.) he uncovers a *Sammelband* in the series *Collection des Mémoires relatifs à la Révolution française*. (Paris, 1825) which contains one of these letters, and also reprints *Le Vieux Cordelier* of Desmoulins, as well as another document of the Revolution, Vilate's *Causes secrètes*. There is no direct proof that Büchner read this volume. Beck assembles a number of possible echoes and motifs. The case for Büchner's having read Desmoulins's letter is the strongest; most of the 'echoes' from *Causes secrètes* and from *Le Vieux Cordelier* could have come from elsewhere. Thiers, for example, reproduced large extracts of *Le Vieux Cordelier*.
10. Mayer (1969 and 1971): In his re-examination of *Unsere Zeit* he looks beyond the usual Volume XII, and takes into account thirteen 'Außerordentliche Hefte' and seven 'Supplementhefte', previously ignored, in one of which (V) he finds, for example, Riouffe's *Mémoires* translated into German. One possible new source which he suggests is: *Galerie historique des contemporains*. Mayer makes a good case for Büchner's having read at least the Danton section in this work; it is furthermore included in the list of works which Büchner borrowed from the Darmstadt library between 1 October 1834 and 12 January 1835. (See Jaspers's dissertation of 1922, pp. 15 f.) Two other sources which he suggests are *Almanach des prisons* and Proussinal, *Histoire secrète du Tribunal révolutionnaire*. Mayer still hopes to find a single source which would contain several of the references which now have to be seen as scattered through a variety of these recently discovered sources. I agree that the case for Büchner's having used a multiplicity of not readily available sources is a poor one, in view of the circumstances under which Büchner wrote *Dantons Tod*. Mayer's detailed academic detective work is irresistible, tempting one to join in his search; on my own reading of the sources in conjunction with Beck's and Mayer's work, I would suggest that if one work were discovered which contained Desmoulins's letter to his wife, as well as the description of the jurors at Danton's trial discovered by Mayer in *Histoire secrète*, and the mention of the prisoners' reading *Nachtgedanken* and *La Pucelle*, such a text would be a convincing candidate for Mayer's missing source.
11. See Viëtor (1949), p. 118: 'Die Art und Weise, wie Büchner diese Wirklichkeitstreue in der Darstellung von Menschen, Vorgängen und Atmosphäre zu erreichen sucht, ist der gradeste und ehrlichste Weg. Er hält sich eng an die Geschichtsbücher, ja fast ängstlich.'

12. Benn, for example, in 1976, quotes this passage from Viëtor, expressing his own opinion that 'everywhere in the play, we find evidence of his deep respect for the historical reality in what appears to him to be its essential aspects' (p.122).
13. See, for example, Sengle, p. 133; cf. Hans Mayer, pp. 186-89.
14. This is sometimes stated in Büchner criticism, but the implications for Büchner's own work have not been very fully investigated. Peter Michelsen, for example, opens his recent article (1978) with a very strong statement on the incompleteness and contradictions which mark documentary materials, and on the essentially interpretative nature of all history writing (pp. 476-77), but he then goes on to state: 'Im ganzen ist er [Büchner] aber von einer ganz erstaunlichen Treue gegenüber den von ihm konsultierten Historikern'. It does not occur to Büchner, he suggests, to question their faithfulness to history (p. 480), but he does not proceed from there to discuss the implications of this for Büchner's own characterization of historical figures.
15. It seemed that there was a useful contribution to be made here, since even writers who deal in detail with *Dantons Tod* as historical drama have not dealt in detail with this aspect of his historical borrowings. The concern of Louis Ferdinand Helbig, for example, in *Das Geschichtsdrama Georg Büchners: Zitatprobleme und historische Wahrheit in Dantons Tod*, is to demonstrate the categorical differences between 'geschichtliche Tatsachen' and 'das Fiktionale der poetischen Wahrheit' (p.11), and this rather leaves out of account the question of subjectivity in various views of the same historical events and figures. In his recent book, *Georg Büchner, Genese und Aktualität seines Werkes*, Gerhart Jancke views Büchner's aesthetic programme as 'unerbittlicher Realismus' and talks of his 'starke Abhängigkeit von den Quellen'; he does recognize parenthetically that the latter are written 'nicht ohne massive Parteilichkeit' (p. 144), but does not pursue the implications of this in his discussion of *Dantons Tod*. Another recent study, Jürgen Sieß, *Zitat und Kontext bei Georg Büchner*, is concerned with the way Büchner adapts quotations to his own context; this is a more superficially researched study than Helbig or Jancke; Sieß has apparently not gone back to the original sources at all, with some unfortunate results (see below, Chapter II, note 14). Bernd Zöllner's dissertation, *Büchners Dantons Tod und das Menschen- und Geschichtsbild in den Revolutionsgeschichten von Thiers und Mignet*, is a most informative study of Thiers and Mignet, but it is not within Zöllner's intention to compare the perspectives of Thiers and Mignet with those of other sources.
16. In Knapp's critical bibliography (1975), for example, out of 190 pages, exactly half a page is devoted to Büchner's 'Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften' (p. 144). This is not Knapp's bias; it roughly reflects the amount of material available on the subject.
17. Jean Strohl, *Lorenz Oken und Georg Büchner* (1936) is still the standard general introduction to the subject. A good and easily available straightforward summary of what Büchner is actually saying in his thesis and his lecture is Hermann Helmig, *Der Morphologe Georg Büchner* (1950). Two dissertations, unfortunately unpublished, are very informative, not only on Büchner's actual research but also on the general scientific background: Otto Döhner, 'Georg Büchners Naturauffassung' (1967), and J.W. Bierbach, 'Der Anatom Georg Büchner und die Naturphilosophen' (1961). A good short general introduction is Jochen Golz's article, 'Die naturphilosophischen Anschauungen Georg Büchners' (1964). (For full details, see the Bibliography under 'Büchner's Science'.)
18. One of the rare writers on the scientific side who suggests paths which the literary critic can profitably follow is Walter L. von Brunn in his 1964 article, 'Georg Büchner', discussed below, p. 20. Some approaches to Büchner's science on the part of literary critics are also discussed below, pp. 63-64.
19. It seems to me that it may be a more fruitful avenue of research to pursue thought patterns which Büchner must have encountered in work which he is known to have done, than to seek out writers whom he might be thought to have read on the basis of apparent verbal echoes in his work. I am very much in agreement with the recent salutary caveat of Thomas Mayer: 'Büchner lebte ... nur wenige Jahre, die mit der Lektüre bereits der eindeutig belegten Quellen- und "Bezugs" texte neben seiner schon physisch-zeitlich phänomenalen eigenen Produktion und Aktivität auf literarischem, naturwissenschaftlichem und politischem Gebiet randvoll ausgefüllt waren. Daß er darüber hinaus all das gelesen haben soll, was die nachgeborene Germanistik bei Rundum-Lektüre zu Erinnerungen gereizt hat, ... diese scheint ... denn doch ausgeschlossen' (in Arnold (1979), pp. 330 f.) Mayer, quite justifiably, regards with some scepticism such attempts as those of Kobel (1974) to prove Büchner's first-hand familiarity with Pascal.
20. Letter to Wilhelm Büchner, November, 1836 (II, 463).
21. Edited by Gerardo Guerrieri, *Georg Büchner, Teatro* (Milan, 1966), p. xiv: 'Di giorno scienziato materialista, di notte visionario.'

22. There is a point, Müller-Seidel argues, at which the 'scientific method' in his literary work reaches its limit, and it is his poetry which has the last word. Müller-Seidel seems to think in terms of an opposition between science and 'Dichtung' in which the rights of 'das Gedichtete' have to be defended: 'Denn das Eigenrecht der Dichtung ist nicht dadurch außer Kraft gesetzt, daß Naturwissenschaft oder Politik oder anderes an seine Stelle treten und ihr eine bloß dienende Funktion für andere zuweisen. Das Gedichtete behauptet sein eigenes Recht' (p. 224).

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Philippeau, I.1.11. Héroult, I.1.11. Danton, I.6.26; III.9.63. Camille, III.1.50. Robespierre, I.3.18,19; I.6.26,28; II.7.44,45. St Just, II.7.46.
2. Critics occasionally recognize the feebleness of some of Büchner's attempts at this kind of comedy, e.g. Knight, p. 82: '... more than one comic character rather feebly recalls the Gobbos.'
3. Viëtor is a particular exponent of Büchner's 'realism' in this sense, and considers that Büchner depicts the 'Volk' in *Dantons Tod* 'mit schneidender Realistik'. He sees in this the strength and purity of Büchner's 'Wille zur Wahrheit des Wirklichen', since he, as an undoubted friend of the people, nevertheless does not make any attempt to depict the people of Paris as being more noble or lovely than they were in his sources. See Viëtor (1949), p. 145.
4. This kind of incident is reported in the literature of the Revolution; in *Unsere Zeit*, for example, one reads that not only in Paris but throughout the departments, the People's Representatives would arrest persons who appeared on Sundays dressed up in good clothes (p. 16.)
5. See *Unsere Zeit*, p. 287, where these words are quoted as a part of the people's answer to attempts to arouse popular support for Robespierre after his arrest: 'Selbst das roheste Volk war der abscheulichen Hinrichtungen müde', says the writer of *Unsere Zeit*, explaining that the people saw no reason to agitate on behalf of the tyrant Robespierre. One encounters the idea in various forms in the literature of the Revolution: e.g. Brissot writes to Barrère 'Le peuple vous demandait du pain, vous avez promis mon sang.' See Riouffe, p.273.
6. When one turns, as is customary, to Thieberger's list of quotations from the sources, one finds as the source of this phrase a comment from *Unsere Zeit*: 'Er [Robespierre] hatte eine gewisse Art, die Worte: Armes Volk und tugendhaftes Volk auszusprechen, welche ihre Wirkung auf seine Zuhörer nie verfehlte' (Vol. III, p.292), a quotation which certainly emphasizes the importance of the rhetoric rather the concept. See Thieberger, p. 35.
7. See Thiers, p. 229. See also Mignet, p. 433: 'La foule, ordinairement bruyante et approbatrice, était silencieuse', and *Unsere Zeit*, p. 117: 'Der Jubel, den das Publikum bei Héberts Hinrichtung bezeugt hatte, war dießmal in eine dumpfe Stille hinübergegangen.'
8. It seems likely that Büchner read at least parts of *Le Nouveau Paris*. The source of Mercier's calling Danton 'der böse Genius der Revolution' (III.1.49) is given by Thieberger (p.45) as Mercier's own expression, 'Danton, le mauvais génie de la France'. He does not cite the context, which is the introduction to the work, in which Mercier, writing of 'la canaille d'une grande ville', says: 'Danton, le mauvais génie de la France, la fit fermenter; et depuis lui, les chefs de parti se sont servis de cette horde infernale...' (Vol. I, p.XX.)
9. Cf. *Der Hessische Landbote* (II,44): 'Der Fürstenmantel ist der Teppich, auf dem sich die Herren und Damen vom Adel und Hofe in ihrer Geilheit übereinanderwälzen – mit Orden und Bändern decken sie ihre Geschwüre und mit kostbaren Gewändern bekleiden sie ihre aussätzigen Leiber. Die Töchter des Volks sind ihre Mägen und Huren, die Söhne des Volks ihre Laquaien und Soldaten.'
10. In her third edition of *Dantons Tod*, Margaret Jacobs has revised her earlier treatment of the erotic content of the play. My quotations are from this third edition (1971).
11. Georg Büchner, *Dantons Tod: Dramatische Bilder aus Frankreichs Schreckenerrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1835). Büchner's handwritten corrections to the text can be seen in the copy at the Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek in Darmstadt.
12. H. Maclean drew attention to this in a short and provocative article in 1957 entitled 'The Moral Conflict in Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*'. He did not attempt to draw too many conclusions from it, saying rather, 'It seems evident that he was attracted to his subject, not solely for its historical interest, but also because certain personal problems relating to his own experience were involved' (p. 33). No critic since has really addressed himself directly to the questions raised by Maclean. Since the completion of the present

- work, however, a volume of essays has appeared (1979) in which there is a new, and in my opinion entirely justified emphasis on the erotic elements in Büchner's work. This is *Georg Büchner I/II*, a special volume in the series *Text und Kritik*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold. T.M. Mayer, in his introductory article, 'Umschlagporträt' (pp.5-15), pays new attention to Büchner as 'Erotiker', and Reinhold Grimm, in his article 'Coeur und Carreau: Über die Liebe bei Georg Büchner' (pp.229-326), sets out deliberately to break the critical silence on this subject. The views expressed do not always coincide with my own, but one welcomes the opening of what is essentially a new area of discussion in Büchner-studies, to which the present work makes its own contribution.
13. This occurs in Thiers's account of the speech made by St Just to the Convention urging the arrest of Danton; it is embedded in his lengthy tirade mainly directed against Danton's treachery and venality (p.210).
  14. Of Büchner's handwritten corrections to the first edition of the play, no less than twenty-eight concern them and their world. See above, Chapter I, note 11.
  15. What use, after all, would the 'Huren' be to Robespierre if one were supposing him to be impotent? This is the general impression given by other versions of Danton's remark: cf. Thiers, p.213: 'Il employa alors pour caractériser l'impuissance du paralytique Couthon, et du lâche Robespierre, des expressions obscènes, mais originales.' (cf. also Landau, writing in 1909, before all the more recent exact research into the sources of *Dantons Tod*: 'Wohl liebte der historische Danton derbe, beißend satirische Aussprüche, die Büchner großentheils übernahm, z.B. das Wort: "Wenn ich Robespierre mein Gesäß (wofür im Drama 'Huren' gesetzt ist) und Couthon meine Beine (bei Büchner 'Waden') hinterlassen könnte!"' (Martens (1965), p. 25). In Viétor's original compilation of source materials (1933), he apparently made this assumption, quoting from *Unsere Zeit* thus: 'Könnte ich Robespierre meine H [ode] n ... etc' (p. 378).
  16. Wolfgang Martens, 'Zum Menschenbild Georg Büchners' (1957/58), in Martens (1965), p. 380, p. 375. Martens includes Marie of *Woyzeck* in these two latter comments, a quite differently conceived character in my opinion and not so easily discussed in the same breath.
  17. See, for example, F. Magendie, *Précis élémentaire de physiologie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1816-17), II, 416 and 419.
  18. See Ernst Büchner, 'Beobachtungen über den Tripper beim männlichen Geschlecht' (1925), and 'Beobachtung einer glücklich abgelaufenen Selbst-Entmannung' (1924); for full details of these and other writings of Ernst Büchner, see the Bibliography under 'The Büchner Family'.
  19. Ernst Büchner himself contributed, as has been mentioned, to journals of medicine and forensic medicine. It is clear from his articles that he was well-versed in the current periodical literature pertaining to his interests. There were in the 1820s at least twenty-two German journals of medicine. (They are listed in *Kritisches Repertorium für die gesammte Heilkunde*, edited by J.N. Rust, I (1823), 7-12.) One can reasonably assume that a number of these found their way into Dr Büchner's library, surely at least the ones to which he himself is known to have contributed, Henke's *Zeitschrift für die Staatsarzneikunde* and Harleß's *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jahrbücher für Medicin und Chirurgie*. Critics have paid little attention to these, except for the volumes of Henke's *Zeitschrift* (Viertes Ergänzungsheft (1825) and Fünftes Ergänzungsheft (1826), which contain Clarus's *Gutachten* of the murderer Johann Christian Woyzeck. Some other scientific publications are known to have been in the possession of Ernst Büchner because they are mentioned in his letter to Georg of 18 December 1836. (See below, Chapter IV, note 6.) In his lecture of 1963, Walter Jens tried eloquently and forcefully to draw critical attention to the importance of Georg Büchner's medical and scientific background, attributing to it quite unequivocally his modernity as a writer: 'Wo liegen die Wurzeln dieser historisch kaum erklärbaren Modernität? Die Antwort fällt nicht schwer: mit Georg Büchner betritt, hundert Jahre vor Musil, Döblin und Broch, der erste vom Geist der Naturwissenschaften geprägte deutsche Schriftsteller das Podium ... Büchner, das ist festzuhalten, war zunächst einmal ein Arzt und Arztekind ... [Wir müssen] den Sohn des Amtschirurgus aus Godelau im Hessischen im väterlichen Naturalienkabinett, zwischen Präparaten und gelehrten medizinischen Zeitschriften suchen' (p. 35). This is a search which today, some seventeen years later, has scarcely even begun.
  20. The edition of the *Rapports* which I have used and which is most useful for someone new to the subject is that of 1824, since it has a sixty-page résumé-index compiled by Destutt de Tracy.
  21. One of the leading exponents of this group, along with Cabanis, was A.L.C. Destutt, Comte de Tracy, whose own *Projets d'éléments d'idéologie* (1801-18) is well worth read-

- ing in this context, since it was much admired not only by Cabanis but also by Magendie. (See Magendie's *Précis*, chapter on intelligence, Vol. I, pp.170 f.)
22. For more information on this, see Owsei Temkin's excellent article, 'The Philosophical Background of Magendie's Physiology', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 20 (1946), 10-35.
  23. This work went through nineteen editions by the end of the century in German alone, and was translated into thirteen languages. Ludwig is usually mentioned briefly in literary criticism of Georg's work as a popularizer of scientific ideas; he is that, of course. His work is also a gold-mine of ideas current and controversial in nineteenth-century intellectual circles, particularly those circles familiar with and involved in the scientific enterprise, such as that of the entire Büchner family.
  24. L. Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff*, fifteenth edition (Leipzig, 1883), p.320.
  25. Ludwig Büchner does not like Vogt's extreme formulation of the idea, and prefers to say, 'Wie es keine Galle ohne Leber, keinen Urin ohne Nieren gibt, so gibt es keinen Gedanken ohne Gehirn; die Seelenthätigkeit ist eine Funktion oder Verrichtung der Gehirns substanz' (p. 327).
  26. Carl Vogt (1817-95), exiled after his involvement in the 1848 revolution, became a professor at the University of Geneva. A distinguished zoologist, he propounded scientific materialism and became a partisan of Darwin's theory of natural selection.
  27. My own reading of Magendie indicates that he does not in fact make cover-all descriptions of what man is, insisting rather that the physiologist address himself to the action of identifiable organs; he is capable of implying vaguely that intellectual phenomena may possibly be governed in some way by the soul, but considers that one can only examine them as the result of the action of the brain, since one cannot locate the soul in a particular organ (Vol. I, p. 170).
  28. Antoine Desmoulins, Part I, Book 1, p.1: 'Le système nerveux, cette partie de l'animal pour laquelle toutes les autres semblent exister, d'où part l'excitation des mouvements, par qui sont transmises et perçues les sensations, où réside l'intelligence, la volonté et la conscience, se compose ...'. The physiological section of this book was written in collaboration with Magendie. (For details, see Bibliography under 'Büchner's Science'.) Büchner cited this work several times in his thesis on the barbel (II, 67,73,79,82 etc.).
  29. See *Précis*, Vol. I, pp. 80-81.
  30. Cf. Viëtor (1949), p.147: '...in der tragischen Symphonie die helle Melodie ...'.
  31. See above, p. 15; Mignet quotes Danton as weakening for a moment at the guillotine, and saying: 'O, ma bien-aimée! ô ma femme! je ne te verrai donc plus!', then interrupting himself suddenly: 'Danton, point de faiblesse' (p.433). Büchner does not use this in his execution scene. It is perhaps not uninteresting that the name Louise which Büchner does not use is one of the names of his mother (Louise Caroline), his sister (Luise) and of his fiancée (Louise Wilhelmine).
  32. *Werke und Briefe*, eighth edition (1958), p. 641.
  33. It is to Jaspers's dissertation that one owes the preservation of the list of books borrowed by Büchner from the Großherzogliche Bibliothek in Darmstadt while he was writing *Dantons Tod*. The library records which she used were subsequently lost in the bombing of the Second World War. The rest of her dissertation usually goes unregarded. She is the only critic I have ever read who regards the women of *Dantons Tod* with some scorn.
  34. Adolf Beck has made a case for Büchner's having read these letters (see above, Introduction, note 9). In my view, his case for the letter published in the 1825 edition of *Le Vieux Cordelier* in the series, *Collection des Mémoires* is stronger than that for the other, particularly since, as Thomas Mayer has since established, this particular 'Sammelband' was in the library at Darmstadt in Büchner's time (Mayer (1969), p. 298). I would agree with Mayer that there is no absolute reason to assume that Büchner read either of them. The second letter can be read in the 1834 edition of *Le Vieux Cordelier* (see Bibliography).
  35. Thiers, p. 235: 'L'infortunée Desmoulins mourut avec un courage digne de son mari et de sa vertu. Depuis Charlotte Cordai et Madame Roland, aucune victime n'avait inspiré un intérêt plus tendre et des regrets plus douloureux'.
  36. cf. Viëtor's description of this incident (1949, p. 147): 'Mitten in der grauen Atmosphäre des politischen Treibens, inmitten der skeptischen und zynischen Männerrede geht mit einmal, wie aus einer andern Welt, ein kleines, helles Licht auf.' He then quotes the above conversation between Camille and Lucile. The 'zynische Männerrede' in this scene happens to consist mainly of Camille and Danton talking about art. Höllerer claims that the short Camille/Lucile dialogue contributes more to the main subject of the drama than the rest of the scene, the main subject for him being the inability to know about (wissen) the people one knows (kennen). Yet Camille and Danton appear to understand each other

- quite adequately, and it is only Lucile in this scene who seems to 'know nothing at all. See Höller (1968), p. 70:
37. *La Morte di Danton* produced by Gli Associati, directed by Sergio Fantoni, at the Pergola Theatre in Florence, March, 1977.
  38. That Büchner himself at some level knew this seems clear, given his medical background. The exact circumstances under which the disease was transmitted (e.g. with or without ejaculation) were still a matter of debate in the medical profession, as one can see from Ernst Büchner's article, 'Über den Tripper' (1925) and many other articles of the time dealing with similar topics.
  39. Hans Mayer who repeats this suggestion when writing about Minna is very cautious about it, adding the legitimate question: 'Was wissen wir von ihr?' (p. 56).
  40. See, for example, p. 28: 'Despite the strong bond of feeling, the strong attachment to her, Minna Jaeglé was not the "Thou" by which Büchner's "Ego" could be redeemed. This was the fault of the father reality with which he could never come to terms ... there exist personalities who, due to a strong traumatic experience, see the world divided into two conflicting, unbridgeable principles: two religions, races – the World of Man as opposed to the world of Woman ...'. If one can resist being put off by the psychological jargon, one finds some original views of Büchner in White.
  41. There is no absolute proof that Minna Jaeglé, shortly before her death in 1880, burned most of Büchner's letters to her, his last play and his diary. One can, however, agree with Knight: 'The matter is not positively proved, but there are considerable grounds for suspicion. Certainly she had the letters and the diary, and certainly these have vanished' (p. 16).
  42. One can still find the long-forgotten works of Luise Büchner in the libraries of the world. I have found a number of them scattered through libraries in the United States, and I include a list of these in my Bibliography under 'The Büchner Family'. Her best-known work in her day was probably *Die Frauen und ihr Beruf: Ein Buch der weiblichen Erziehung* (1856), which was in its fifth edition by the 1880s. Her novels are in a sense even more interesting as documents of women's problems, not because they are 'about women', but because they illustrate unwittingly the problems of an intelligent woman writer trying to break out of the stereotypes of 'women's writing' and only partially succeeding. Little critical work has been done on Luise Büchner but she would present a challenging subject for feminist research. Since completion of the present work, an article has appeared in the *German Quarterly* by Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 'Ein Dichter: An Introduction to the World of Luise Büchner' (1979), which should lead the way to further discussion.
  43. This is the only one of her works to appear in a modern edition (1965).
  44. For example, Riouffe, pp. 58 f., 88 f.; Riouffe, as is well known, recounts the story of numbers of women who shouted 'Vive le roi', thus choosing death. In *Unsere Zeit*, one also finds such harrowing stories, e.g. pp. 156 f.
  45. See, for example, Benn (1976), p. 140: 'It is precisely because Julie and Lucile have this function of providing solace, an escape from the ugliness of the world, that one might be tempted to suspect Büchner of idealizing their characters in a manner inconsistent with realistic theory.'

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Petersen, p. 253. This is one of the most interesting articles to appear on Büchner in recent years, but perhaps Knapp is overstating the case when he says in his critical bibliography (1975) that in the light of it, the few earlier attempts to clarify the 'moral question' can now be regarded as 'überholt'; he includes among these Maclean's article (see above, Chapter I, note 12), but while Petersen's article is certainly much more sophisticated, philosophically, than Maclean's, some of the very simple and straightforward questions raised by Maclean are not addressed by Petersen at all. See Knapp (1975), p. 155.
2. See Thiers, p. 119: 'Camille, sans vouloir qu'on ouvre les prisons, ni qu'on fit retrograder la révolution, demandait l'institution d'un comité qui s'appellerait de clémence, qui ferait la revue des prisons...'
3. See above, Chapter I, note 34.
4. Festivals dedicated to Bacchus.
5. Desmoulins (1825 edition), pp. 133 f.
6. The spelling of the name of Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac varies in Büchner's sources, sometimes Barère, sometimes Barrère, but the standard accepted spelling is Barère. Büchner spells the name, Barrère, and I use this spelling when referring to Büchner's

- character, Barrère. Otherwise, I refer to the historical character as Barère. I follow the same practice in regard to the characters Herrmann (Herman) and Payne (Paine).
7. See Thiers, p. 215: 'Le président Herman et Fouquier-Tinville, au lieu de tirer les jurés au sort, comme le voulait la loi, firent un choix, et prirent ce qu'ils appelaient *les solides*.' Thomas Mayer has suggested another possible source, de Proussinal, *Histoire secrète*, which contains an impressive number of the details describing the jurors which Büchner uses in this dialogue.
  8. Stories of this kind are legion in the literature of the Revolution. See especially *Unsere Zeit*, pp. 14 f.
  9. According to *Unsere Zeit*, Dumas had sworn a hundred times to have all his relatives killed, but most of them had emigrated as soon as they saw him in power. His wife, who would not flee, was imprisoned in the Luxembourg, where she was to be executed on 10 Thermidor. 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), the day of Robespierre's downfall, saved her life (p. 233).
  10. See *Unsere Zeit*, p. 233. There are also references to Barère's mistress, 'la Demahy courtisane' in Vilate's *Causes secrètes*; he describes the 'Lusthaus' in Clichy, mentioned in *Unsere Zeit* as belonging to Barère. This is one of Beck's citations in support of his contention that Büchner read Vilate. See Beck, p. 360.
  11. *Dumas*. ...die Revolutionsmänner haben einen Sinn, der andern Menschen fehlt, und dießer Sinn trägt sie nie.  
*Bürger*. Das ist der Sinn des Tiegens (IV.2.64).
  12. 10 August 1792: the King was driven out of the Tuileries.
  13. 31 May 1793: the Girondist deputies were expelled from the Convention.
  14. An incident of a prisoner, a writer called Duplaine de St Albine, who thus saves himself is described in *Unsere Zeit* (VI, p.8), cited by Thomas Mayer (1969), p.321: 'Als die Thüre des Kerkers, in welchem er nebst andern Gefangenen sich befand, eingesprengt wurde, kam er, mit einem Messer in der Hand, bis an den eindringenden Haufen des Volkes ...'. The danger of discussing Büchner's use of his sources without actually going back to such quotations in their original context is illustrated by Jürgen Sieß's handling of Mayer's quotation. Sieß assumes that the unidentified 'er' of the quotation is Barère himself, and he states that Büchner is using a passage of *Unsere Zeit* in which Barère escapes from the 'Septembriseurs'. He bases his interpretation of Büchner's dramatic version of the incident on this misapprehension: 'Im Geschichtswerk erinnert die dritte Person (er) jeweils an den Abstand, den der Verfasser zu dem historischen Individuum hält. Büchner nimmt diesen Abstand in die Person des Dramas hinein. In dem Monolog zieht Barrère, jetzt Mitglied des Wohlfahrtsausschusses, den Barrère von 1792 zur Rechenschaft' (p. 23).
  15. cf. Schmidt (1970), p. 64: 'It is typical of Büchner to pry into his characters more deeply than one might expect; Laflotte and Barrère hint at a complexity of character not evident in those surrounding them.'
  16. For the spelling of Payne, see above, note 6.
  17. See Thiers., p. 223 f.: 'Le lâche Laflotte, croyant obtenir la vie et la liberté en dénonçant un complot, courut faire au concierge du Luxembourg une déclaration, dans laquelle il supposa une conspiration près d'éclater au-dedans et au-dehors des prisons ...'.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Normally footnoted as a historic line, it was said, however, not by Robespierre but by St Just in the days of turmoil preceding the execution of the Hébertists: '... Wie kann ein Reich bestehen, wenn bürgerliche Verhältnisse besonders seine Feinde beschützen? Wer eine Revolution nur zur Hälfte vollendet, gräbt sich selbst sein Grab.' See *Unsere Zeit*, p. 73.
2. Cf. Giorgio Dolfini who suggests that in any case the question, 'Was geht es dich an, so lang sie dich in Ruhe lassen?', is 'un discorso quasi grottesco in bocca ad un politico!' (p. 30).
3. *Le Vieux Cordelier* (1825 edition), p. 124. This is perhaps the best single quotation to suggest that Büchner had read more of Desmoulins than is reported in Thiers. It is, of course, by no means proof of this.
4. See Thiers, pp. 131 f. See also *Le Vieux Cordelier* (1825 edition), pp. 94 f.
5. This is only so if one knows something about the historical background, e.g. that Ronsin was one of the recently executed Hébertists, that Gaillard was an 'ultra' who had committed suicide on the arrest of Ronsin, etc. This speech must be one of several in the play that are close to incomprehensible in the modern theatre.



6. Viëtor (1949) writes of this speech, 'Sie entspricht zum größeren Teil wörtlich der Rede, die Robespierre damals wirklich im Konvent gehalten hat' (p. 131). This has been echoed again and again in the criticism, and few distinctions are made, e.g. between Robespierre's actual speech in the Jacobin Club and his earlier speech in the Convention.
7. Thieberger cites the original speeches from which Büchner had taken sentences, but he orders them line by line as they appear in Büchner's text, and unidentified as to the original speaker, time, or place. This method can easily lead readers to the false conclusion that in reading Büchner, they are also reading Robespierre. In a recent article on the 'stilus demagogicus', Reinhard Roche writes: 'Wenn wir einige Straffungen und Umstellungen abziehen, so stoßen wir also auf einen Sprachstil, der nicht nur 130, sondern gar 170 Jahre zurückliegt' (p. 251). He draws numerous comparisons between Robespierre's 'demagogic style' and that of the Nazis. This article needs careful handling since much of the demagogic style which he talks about is actually that of Büchner the dramatist.
8. Cf. Mignet's version of a speech made by St Just in the same period: 'Que voulez vous, vous qui ne voulez pas de vertu pour être heureux (les anarchistes)? Que voulez vous, vous qui ne voulez pas de terreur contre les méchants (les modérés)?' (p. 426).
9. Thiers describes the dynamics of the situation very simply: the Committee of Public Safety saw the real trouble makers and enemies in the ultras. In the moderates they saw only old friends and patriots, but they were obliged to condemn the moderates and appeal to terror in order not to appear weak to the ultras. Danton and Camille rose to this and began to make personal attacks on the Robespierrists, ultimately alienating Robespierre himself (pp. 161 f.)
10. The language in which Mignet reports this speech is also a good deal more moderate and explanatory: 'Il faut étouffer les ennemis intérieurs et extérieurs de la république, ou périr avec elle. Or, dans cette situation, la première maxime de votre politique doit être que l'on conduit le peuple par la raison et les ennemis du peuple par la terreur. Si le ressort du gouvernement populaire dans la paix est le vertu, le ressort du gouvernement populaire, en révolution, est à-la-fois la vertu et la terreur' (p. 424).
11. I.3.18, lines 34-39, p. 19, lines 1-4.
12. See *Unsere Zeit*, pp. 42-44: the sentence which Büchner uses as the last sentence of his paragraph is: 'Der gefährlichste Bürger ist derjenige, welcher leichter ein Dutzend rothe Mützen verbraucht, als eine gute Handlung vollbringt' (p. 19, lines 13-15). This is partially borrowed from the last sentence of a paragraph directed by Robespierre against the 'ultras' rather than the moderates; describing an ultra-revolutionary, branding him here as a false revolutionary, he ends by calling him 'ein lauter Freund der Formen des Patriotismus', and then proceeds, 'und gleich den Frömmlichen, deren vorgeblicher Feind er ist, es mit den innern Tugenden haltend, würde er lieber hundert rothe Mützen verbrauchen, als Eine gute That verrichten. Welchen wesentlichen Unterschied findet ihr zwischen diesen Menschen und euren Gemäßigten? ...' (pp. 43 f.).
13. In *Unsere Zeit*, the expression occurs in a speech of Couthon's, made after Hébert's execution: 'Es ist Zeit, daß die öffentliche Moral sich reinige, und daß Gerechtigkeit und Tugend an die Tagesordnung kommen' (p. 85). Mignet writes of St Just in the days of the warring factions: 'Il fit décréter que la justice et la probité étaient à l'ordre du jour' (p. 427). Thiers also describes St Just as saying after accusing both factions, 'il fallait mettre à l'ordre du jour, la justice, la probité et toutes les vertus républicaines' (p. 182).
14. See Mignet, pp. 425 f.: "Sans doute", ajouta-t-il, "il faut comprimer les royalistes, mais nous ne devons frapper que des coups utiles à la république, et il ne faut pas confondre l'innocent avec le coupable." "Eh! qui vous a dit", reprit Robespierre avec aigreur, "qu'on ait fait périr un innocent?" Danton se tourna alors vers un de ses amis, qui l'avait accompagné, et avec un sourire amer: "Qu'en dis-tu? Pas un innocent n'a péri!" Après ces paroles, ils se séparèrent: toute amitié fut rompue.' Thomas Mayer has discovered a historical account of this parting exchange which is even closer to Büchner's: *Galerie historique des contemporains*, Vol. IV, p. 117. Danton says, for example, in this version, to Paris: 'Qu'en dis-tu, Fabricius ... pas un innocent n'a péri', and then, 'Il n'y a pas un instant à perdre, il faut se montrer.'
15. 'Die Wollust des Schmerzes' is a phrase which can also be found in that same letter of Büchner's to his fiancée of 10 March 1834, when he uses it to describe his own sufferings; immediately after his description of the turmoil into which he was thrown by his readings on the revolution, he says that he has recovered from a recent illness: 'Ich erwünschte meine Gesundheit. Ich glühte, das Fieber bedeckte mich mit Küssen und umschlang mich wie der Arm der Geliebten. Die Finsterniß wogte über mir, mein Herz schwoll in unendlicher Sehnsucht, es drangen Sterne durch das Dunkel, und Hände und Lippen bückten sich nieder. Und jetzt? Und sonst? Ich habe nicht einmal die Wollust des Schmerzes und

des Sehnsens' (II, 426). If one reads this in the background of Robespierre's speech, one senses the neurotic intensity of a Robespierre, longing for the voluptuousness of pain, and accepting instead the cold torment of the executioner. Büchner does not develop this potentially fascinating aspect of Robespierre's character.

16. Thiers, p. 496. It is with this sentence that Thiers ends his sixth volume in which he has described the fall of Hébert, of Danton, and finally of Robespierre.
17. It will be observed that the word 'hurt' is added to the dramatic version.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. The report on this work was published in Paris in 1811. Georges Cuvier and Alexandre Brongniart, *Essai sur la géographie minéralogique des environs de Paris, avec une carte géognostique, et des coupes de terrain*.
2. This controversy, as well as many other nascent and developing ideas in pre-Darwinian evolutionary thinking (such as Cuvier's theory of successive creations) is discussed thoroughly and subtly, yet in a manner entirely accessible to the layman or the newcomer to this area of eighteenth and nineteenth-century thought, in John C. Greene's excellent study, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and its Impact on Western Thought* (1959).
3. Translation by Mueller (1963), p. 66.
4. Translation by Price (1971), p. 66.
5. Translation by Schmidt (1971), p. 102.
6. Some publications in the possession of Ernst Büchner are mentioned in his letter to Georg of 18 December 1836 (II, pp. 500 f.): 'von Frorieps Notizen' = Ludwig Friedrich von Froriep, *Notizen aus dem Gebiete der Natur und Heilkunde*, 50 vols (Erfurt, Weimar, 1822-36); 'die anatomischen Tafeln von Weber', i.e. Ernst Heinrich Weber, *Anatomia comparata nervi sympathici cum tabulis aeneis* (Leipzig, 1817); and 'Kaups systematische Beschreibung des Thierreiches', of which Ernst Büchner possessed the ten volumes already published, i.e. J.J. Kaup, *Das Tierreich in seinen Hauptformen systematisch beschrieben* (Darmstadt, 1835-39).
7. J.J. Kaup, *Skizzierte Entwicklungsgeschichte und natürliches System der europäischen Thierwelt. I. Teil, welcher die Vogelsaugetiere und Vögel, nebst Andeutung der Entstehung der letzteren aus Amphibien enthält* (Darmstadt and Leipzig, 1829). Since one knows specifically that Ernst Büchner acquired Kaup's *Beschreibung des Thierreiches* volume by volume as it appeared in the 1830s (see above, note 6), one can reasonably assume that he bought this also. It is a boldly speculative work, in which Kaup discusses the development of the advanced animals out of the lower animals, going as far as the lowest animal forms which stand on the borders of plant world. He postulates the derivation of organic life from inorganic nature, and even of man from the apes (see p. 14). Kaup himself later abjured this work as a 'Jugendsünde' and became a declared opponent of Darwin.
8. The placing of the date of creation around 4,000 B.C., by means of counting generations ('begats') in the Bible, had become unacceptable to scientists in the eighteenth century, but Buffon's 75,000 years ran into great trouble with Paris theologians and others, and the leap into millions of years necessary for Darwin's theories was too great for many of his contemporaries.
9. See, for example, Martens, 'Ideologie und Verzweiflung', in Martens (1965), pp. 429 f.; also Lehmann, 'Prolegomena' (1963), p. 209.
10. For example, Lorenz Oken, *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie* (Jena, 1809), Book III, especially paragraphs 3456, 3457, 3459.
11. Landau in his early introductions to Büchner's play of 1909 took a very level-headed approach when he wrote: 'Die streng naturwissenschaftliche Weltanschauung Büchners kommt übrigens in ernsthafter, nicht verzerrter Form in der großen Rede Saint Justs im Nationalkonvent zum Ausdruck, in der das natürliche Geschehen mit dem historischen interessant in Parallele gesetzt wird' (Martens (1965), p. 26). He does not expand on this, seeming to find it obvious, but it has found few echoes in subsequent criticism. Other more recent writers who make similar statements have not been primarily concerned with their implications. e.g. Michelsen, pp. 484-85, and Jens, pp. 37 f. Those most knowledgeable writers whose concern is with Büchner's science and scientific backgrounds, such as Döhner, do not mention St Just's speech.
12. Literary critics usually declare quite reasonably their incompetence in comparative anatomy, and do not attempt to read the 'technical' parts of Büchner's writings: see, for example, Knight, pp. 157 ff. The problem is that it is as difficult and dangerous to general-

- ize on the basis of statements taken out of context in a scientific work as it is in any other kind of work.
13. Müller-Seidel, pp. 217 f.: 'Zwar erinnert die Zürcher Antrittsvorlesung über die Schädelnerven in manchen Wendungen noch an die idealistische Naturphilosophie. Da ist noch fast wie bei Goethe, von Metamorphose der Pflanze, von Urgesetzen, vom Gesetz der Schönheit und von notwendiger Harmonie die Rede. Aber das Bild der Natur in den Dichtungen Büchners ist das Bild einer illusionslos gesehenen Natur, von klassischer Harmonie keine Spur.'
  14. 'Probevorlesung über Schädelnerven', II, pp. 291-93.
  15. *Le système nerveux du barbeau*, II, p. 125.
  16. See *Précis élémentaire*, Vol. I, p. 161. For use of personified nature, see, for example, p.179: 'La nature n'abandonne point les animaux à eux-mêmes ... la nature leur a donné l'instinct ...' *et passim*.
  17. e.g. Johannes Müller (1801-58), physiologist, in his early years, J.B. Wilbrand (1779-1846), physiologist, J.W. Ritter (1776-1810), physiologist and physicist, etc.
  18. See Lorenz Oken, *Die Zeugung* (Bamberg, 1805); see also in summary form: Lorenz Oken, *Lehrbuch der Physiologie*, Book II (Jena, 1810), in the chapter on 'Zeugungstheorie': 'Es ist kein Organismus erschaffen, der größer als ein infusorischer Punct ist. Es wird kein Organismus erschaffen, und ist nie einer erschaffen worden, der nicht mikroskopisch ist. Alles Größere ist nicht erschaffen, sondern entwickelt. Der Mensch ist nicht erschaffen, sondern entwickelt' (Paragraphs 948-50).
  19. He reinforces the point in his lecture (II, 291-93).
  20. *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Book III, Paragraph 109: see *Werke in drei Bänden*, edited by K. Schlechta (Munich, 1960), Vol. II, p. 115.
  21. These comments are quoted by Greene (p. 303): he gives their source as a letter from Darwin to Asa Gray, Down, 22 May 1860, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, edited by Francis Darwin (New York, 1898), II, p. 105.
  22. Mayer does tend in this chapter to distort 'Darwinism', equating it roughly with Herbert Spencer's 'social Darwinism', and stating that Büchner rejected 'this kind of teleology' as well as Christian teleology (p. 361). It is a misleading statement of a very complex issue.
  23. See R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York, Oxford, 1960), p. 135 (first edition, 1945).
  24. Cf. Greene on Darwin, p. 203: 'So it went, around and around in Darwin's head – law and chance, chance and law'.
  25. See Thiers, p. 219: 'Les hommes de ma trempe sont inappréciables dans les révolutions ... c'est sur leur front qu'est empreint le génie de la liberté.'

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. See above, Chapter I, note 8.
2. This expression alluding to the execution of the Girondists is to be found in memoirs of the Revolution, e.g. Riouffe, p. 55: 'Le sang des vingt-deux fumait encore, lorsque la citoyenne Roland arriva ...'.
3. Chaumette was one of the group of ultra-revolutionaries violently opposed to the Dantonists; he had survived the execution of Hébert, but ended on the guillotine soon after Danton.
4. See III.3.51: *Lacroix*, 'Wie, so viel Unglückliche, und in einem so elenden Zustande?' *Der Gefangne*, 'Haben Ihnen die Guillotinenkarren nie gesagt, daß Paris eine Schlachtbank sey?' Cf. Riouffe, pp. 68 f. 'Tout le surprenait, et la forme du tribunal, et le régime si dur des prisons et le nombre des prisonniers. "Quoi, lui dit un d'entre eux, jamais des charretées de victimes, se rencontrant sur vos pas, ne vous ont appris qu'il y avait dans Paris une boucherie d'hommes! Non, répondait-il, je n'ai jamais rencontré de charrettes."'
5. Riouffe, p. 67: 'C'est à pareil jour que j'ai fait instituer le tribunal révolutionnaire; mais j'en demande pardon à Dieu et aux hommes. Ce n'était pas pour qu'il fût le fléau de l'humanité; c'était pour prévenir le renouvellement des massacres du 2. septembre.' Thiers quotes a more or less identical statement (p. 213), but it is from Mignet that Büchner takes the line: 'Messieurs, ... j'espérais dans peu vous faire sortir d'ici; mais m'y voilà moi-même avec vous, et je ne sais pas maintenant comment cela finira' (p. 430).
6. Riouffe, p. 67. This observation of Riouffe's is not cited by the critics of the sources.
7. See above, note 5. The pious-sounding 'der Himmel weiß' is Büchner's version of Mignet's 'Je ne sais pas ...'.

8. Thiers, p. 233; cf. Mignet's version of the death of the Dantonists: 'Ainsi périrent les tardifs, mais derniers défenseurs de l'humanité, de la modération: les derniers qui voulurent la paix entre les vainqueurs de la révolution, la miséricorde pour les vaincus. Après eux aucune voix ne se fit plus entendre de quelque temps contre la dictature de la terreur' (p. 433 f.). Zöllner in his dissertation discusses the attitudes of Thiers and Mignet to the 'great man' theory of history, and comes to the conclusion that Mignet does not believe that the individual can influence the course of events, but thinks there are nevertheless towering historical personalities; Thiers he believes to be less 'deterministic' (pp. 35 ff.) I have not made an exact study of Thiers's and Mignet's entire histories of the Revolution, but can observe on the basis of my own reading that, whatever their theories of history, they both make quite sweeping assessments of personalities, and their apparent influence on actual events.
9. George Rudé in his recent book on *Robespierre: Portrait of a Revolutionary Democrat* (London, 1975) has an illuminating section on the changing image of Robespierre from Thermidor through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into the period after the Second World War, a useful antidote to the notion that historical personalities are fixed entities (pp. 57-95).
10. Riouffe, p. 67: 'Je laisse tout dans un gachis épouvantable: il n'y en a pas un qui s'entende en gouvernement': also Thiers, p. 214: 'Je laisse tout dans un désordre épouvantable ...'.
11. Riouffe, p. 67: 'Ce qui prouve que Robespierre est un Néron, c'est qu'il n'avait jamais parlé à Camille Desmoulines avec tant d'amitié, que la veille de son arrestation.'
12. See above, p. 70.
13. 'Das Gottesproblem und seine Behandlung durch Büchner erschließt sich in jenem seltsamen Zwischenspiel im Luxembourg-Gefängnis und in den furchtbar-schalkhaften Deduktionen der Marionette Thomas Paine' (p. 345).
14. See, for example, Thieberger, p. 45. Also p. 53: 'Thomas Payne est substitué à Anacharsis Cloots, comme champion de l'athéisme.'
15. See also Thiers, p. 188 f.: 'Clootz, alors plein encore de ses opinions philosophiques jusqu'à l'échafaud, poursuivit les derniers restes de déisme qui pouvaient demeurer en eux, et ne cessa de leur prêcher jusqu'au bout la nature et la raison, avec un zèle ardent et un inconcevable mépris de la mort.'
16. Phrase used by Büchner in his letter of 28 July 1835 (II, 443).
17. Clootz, another foreign member of the Convention at the time when Paine was a member, would have been a more historically appropriate mouthpiece for the ideas which Büchner here gives to Payne, but he had been executed with the Hébertists, unlike Chaumette who had survived, and was, like Paine, in gaol when Danton arrived there. One might almost suspect Büchner of mischievously refuting the ideas of the real Paine, who based his theism precisely on the wonder of creation and on man's moral sense: he wrote in the second book of his *Age of Reason*, begun in the Paris gaols: 'I totally disbelieve that the Almighty ever did communicate anything to man ... otherwise than by the universal display of himself in creation, and by that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions and disposition to good ones' (See *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, edited by M.D. Conway (New York, London, 1896), Vol. IV, p. 184). Amusing as this is as an ironical twist, it seems much more likely that Büchner had read no Paine, but merely seized on the notoriety of Paine as a convinced anti-religionist, knowing nothing of the finer points of Paine's theism.
18. *Kraft und Stoff*, fifteenth edition (Leipzig, 1883), p. 421. This particular comment ('Er bekommt in uns Allen Zahnweh ...') does not appear in the earlier editions. It will be remembered that Ludwig Büchner edited some of his brother's works, including *Dantons Tod*, in 1850.
19. Cf. Knight, who describes Danton's comment, 'Jeder handelt seiner Natur gemäß, d.h. er tut was ihm wohl tut', as 'a speech the psychology of which appears to belong to the age of Taine, some forty years after Büchner's time: here it is quite startling' (p. 75).
20. 'Ich nehme mit einem geringern Vater vorlieb, wenigstens werd' ich ihm nicht nachsagen können, daß er mich unter seinem Stande in Schweinställen oder auf den Galeeren habe erziehen lassen' (III.1.48).
21. 'Nur der Verstand kann Gott beweisen, das Gefühl empört sich dagegen' (ibid.).
22. See 'Georg Büchners Ärgernis' (1973). Wittkowski's interpretation, stressing, as it does, the angry and accusatory tone of Büchner, is a more subtle and successful attempt, in my view, to prove Büchner to be a religious writer than Anneliese Bach's attempts. Since the completion of the present work, the ideas of Wittkowski here discussed have been presented in greater detail and in the overall context of Büchner's life and work in his new monograph on Georg Büchner (1978); see especially pp. 206-25.

23. Viëtor (1949), p. 104. For a more recent discussion of contradiction as an essential ingredient of Büchner's characterization, see Kobel (1976); Kobel, seeking in this, as in many other aspects of Büchner's work, to show the influence of Pascal, quotes Pascal's words: 'Der Mensch ist ein sich selbst widersprechendes Wesen: "Il est toujours divisé, contraire à lui-même"' (p. 56).
24. Viëtor (1934), in Martens (1965), pp. 114 f.
25. Benn (1976), p. 108. Benn also explains Danton, somewhat after the manner of Viëtor: e.g. 'The strongest driving force in Danton's life has been his love of freedom, his concern for the success of the Revolution; and though this force has now been crossed by his disillusionment and *taedium vitae*, it can still make itself genuinely felt in him' (p. 124).

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1. Dolfini, p. 42: 'Nell'ambito di un sistema disincantato e lucidamente pessimistico come quello del Danton büchneriano che posto può occupare, nella già problematica scala dei valori etici, la 'patria'? Non è forse incompatibile con l'universo dantoniano un simile concetto? . . . Si tratta allora di incoerenza del Danton büchneriano dovuta ad assunzione passiva delle fonti? oppure di effettuale espediente strutturale per lo smascheramento del personaggio?'
2. See I.1.12: Camille: 'Laßt ihn, glaubt ihr er könne die Finger davon lassen, wenn es zum Handeln kömmt?' Hérault: 'Ja, aber bloß zum Zeitvertreib, wie man Schach spielt.'
3. K. Viëtor (1934), in Martens (1965), p. 103.
4. Büchner's Danton and Thiers's Danton are frequently equated quite uncritically, for example, by C. David: 'In [Büchners] Drama weist [Danton] scheinbare Widersprüche auf: es sind dieselben Gegensätze, die Thiers dem historischen Danton verleiht'; see Martens (1965), p. 331. Hans Mayer, on the other hand, who gives his own well thought-out interpretation of the historical Danton's character, sees clearly that Büchner's quotations from the sources do not always fit the Danton whom Mayer sees in the play: 'Die historische Geschichtsrede mit ihrer stolzen Selbstkennzeichnung findet sich zwar auch im Drama, sie wurde aus den Quellen übernommen, allein sie paßt nur schlecht zum eigentlichen Bild des Büchner-Helden, zu seiner Verzweiflung, seinem geschichtlichen Nihilismus' (p. 198).
5. This is in no way an attempt 'to discredit Büchner's work by insisting on his youth', a type of criticism which Benn suggests must be firmly rejected (1976, p.269). 'The insights of youth', Benn goes on, 'are different from those of age, but not necessarily less valid.' One of the aims of the present work is to understand these insights more fully.
6. Jacobs, p. 163: 'Danton does not believe in a personal God; his absolute is Nothingness, and it is impossible to attain to this; but involved as he is in the horror which is life and death (both of which he sees as forms of decay) he can envisage the possibility of a God – 'Ruhe, Nichts' – which is neither life nor death but complete annihilation.'
7. *Kraft und Stoff*, fifteenth edition (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 19 and 27.
8. The equation of atheism with pessimism lingers persistently even in present-day Büchner criticism. In his day, Ludwig Büchner strove mightily to convince his reading public that it was not a necessary equation, as also did Luise Büchner in, for example, her exhortatory essay of 1859, 'Der Materialismus-Schrecken', in *Nachgelassene belletristische vermischte Schriften* (1878), pp. 312-27.
9. A commonplace of Büchner-criticism is that Wilbrand was 'ein halb nährischer Anatom und Physiologe' (Mayer, p. 328), and the model for the Doctor in *Woyzeck*. This is, in my view, a considerable over-simplification both of the figure of Wilbrand and of the Doctor. This is not the place to argue this, but it should be stated that Wilbrand cannot be dismissed as 'halb-nährisch'; the interested reader will find a serious analysis of his work in Christian Probst's article, 'Johann Bernhard Wilbrand (1779-1846) und die Physiologie der Romantik', *Südhoffs Archiv*, 50 (1966), 157-78.
10. It is not hard to find such apparently diverse speculations merging, as in Luise Büchner's essay, for example (see above, note 8), where she, the 'materialist', says to the reader: 'Es hat dich empört zu hören, wie der Materialist die Ewigkeit des Stoffes lehrt – ist es dir nicht klar, daß dir, d.h. dem Menschengeschlecht, damit zugleich die Ewigkeit des Geistes garantiert ist?' (p.321).
11. 'Man hat mir von einer Krankheit erzählt, die einem das Gedächtniß verlieren mache. Der Tod soll etwas davon haben. Dann kommt mir manchmal die Hoffnung, daß er vielleicht noch kräftiger wirke und einem Alles verlieren mache. Wenn das wäre!'
12. See, for example, Müller-Seidel, p. 222: 'Es ist nicht abwegig, von einem Nihilismus in Büchners Dichtung zu sprechen. Aber er hat nicht das letzte Wort.'

13. See, for example, Viëtor (1934) in Martens (1965), p. 115: ‘“Die Welt ist das Chaos. Das Nichts ist der zu gebärende Weltgott.” Das ist Dantons letztes Wort, sein Abschied an das Leben. Will sagen: es bleibt für ihn dabei, daß dies das Gültigste ist, was man über die Beschaffenheit der Welt aussagen kann.’
14. Krapp is referring here specifically to the one line quoted above (IV.5.72), and to the paragraph (III.7.61) which reads: ‘Das Nichts hat sich ermordet, die Schöpfung ist seine Wunde, wir sind seine Blutstropfen, die Welt das Grab worin es fault’; see Krapp, pp. 68 f.
15. See Bach (1961), pp. 7 f.: ‘Büchners Drama verkündet nicht den Nihilismus, es stellt vielmehr eine Auseinandersetzung mit ihm dar. Aus dem Grauen subjektiver Verwesungsvorstellungen erhebt sich zum Schluß die gewaltige Gestalt des rätselhaften Schnitters, die über sich selbst hinausweist auf die unergründliche Realität Gottes.’
16. See Viëtor (1934), in Martens, 1965, pp. 99-100, and G.H. von Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1879-94), Part IV, pp. 310 f.
17. Benno von Wiese, for example, in interpreting Büchner’s drama as the expression of a nihilistic view of life, rejects from the start a political interpretation of *Dantons Tod* and a socio-economic view of *Woyzeck*; see ‘Georg Büchner: Die Tragödie des Nihilismus’, pp. 513-34. For the opposite point of view, see, for example, Mayer, discussed below, pp. 101 f.
18. In some source-materials, this is put very strongly, for example in the testimony of August Becker: ‘Als er später hörte, daß die Bauern die meisten gefundenen Flugschriften auf die Polizei abgeliefert hätten, als er vernahm, daß sich auch die Patrioten gegen seine Flugschrift ausgesprochen, gab er alle seine politischen Hoffnungen in bezug auf ein Anderswerden auf’; see Georg Büchner, *Werke und Briefe*, edited by F. Bergemann (1958), p. 562.
19. In two letters to the editor Franzos in 1878, his brother, Wilhelm Büchner, recalls these months, and tells of Georg’s constant thoughts of flight, his fears of the inevitable estrangement from his father, his concern for his friends in gaol, his own fears of imprisonment, and his incessant worries about money; see *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Bergemann, pp. 565-69.
20. See ‘Danton von Büchner aus gesehen’, in Martens (1965), p. 328; he makes this point in answer to Lukács: ‘Es ist nicht so, wie Lukács behauptet, daß er dabei die revolutionären Kräfte beleben will.’
21. See Wilhelm Büchner’s letters (above, note 19).
22. See *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Lehmann, II, letters 32, 38, 54, 62.
23. See, for example, letters 39, 40, 43, 51.
24. J. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, second edition, Vol. III (Leipzig, 1855), p. 61.
25. Mayer, pp. 189 f. The following summary of Mayer’s view is based on his chapter on *Dantons Tod*, entitled ‘Thermidorstimmung’, pp. 182-207.
26. For example, p. 10: ‘Nicht jeder kann ein Dandy werden; eine bestimmte Veranlagung dazu ist nötig’; p. 41: ‘Der wahre Dandy ist durch Geld oder Besitz unabhängig. Büchner war unbegütert’; p. 55: ‘Es leuchtet sofort ein, daß Robespierre, dem doch die Tugend als Höchstes galt, unserem Dichter, der ein Genußmensch war, widerwärtig war.’
27. Letter to his fiancée, 20 January 1837 (II, 464).
28. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Lehmann, Vol. II: letters from Büchner, 4, 14, 56; letters to Büchner, 2, 3, 16, 20, 21, 24.
29. See L.W. Luck’s ‘Mitteilungen aus Schul- und Universitätszeit’: ‘Es wurde damals schon erzählt, daß er [Büchner] und jener in Exzentrizität mit ihm Wettfeirnde [Minnigerode], sich in der letzten Gymnasialzeit nur mit den Worten zu grüßen pflegten, Bon jour, citizenen’; in Georg Büchner, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Bergemann (1958), p. 557. One derives some sense of the ‘schoolboy politics’ of Georg and his Gymnasium friends from the fictional account in Luise Büchner’s *Ein Dichter*.
30. See Wilhelm Büchner’s letters to Franzos (above, note 19), pp. 565 f.
31. Letter from Gutzkow, Frankfurt, 7 April 1835 (II, 478).
32. For example, in the famous letter of 10 March 1834; see above pp. 50 f.

#### NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. Danton: see I.6.27. Marion: ‘Meine Natur war einmal so, wer kann da drüber hinaus?’ (I.5.22). Payne: ‘Ich handle meiner Natur gemäß’ (III.1.49).
2. Danton: see II.5.41. St Just: see II.7.45.
3. II.1.33; cf. St Just: ‘Was liegt daran ob sie an einer Seuche oder an der Revolution sterben?’ (II.7.45).

4. Danton: see IV.5.71 f. Payne: see III.1.47 f.
5. Evidence of this can be found in Ernst Büchner's own writings, for example in his article 'Versuchter Selbstmord durch Verschlucken von Stecknadeln' (1823), in which he describes tests carried out on a dog (pp. 331-37).
6. See, for example, I.1.9 and II.1.32.
7. See *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Bergemann (1922). This note, in the now quite rare 1922 edition, is not included in the later Bergemann editions, and is encountered rarely in Büchner criticism. Martens quotes it in his article 'Zum Menschenbild Georg Büchners' (1957), in Martens (1965), p. 379, also in a footnote. There has been some discussion of its source. Bergemann called it an 'utterance of Georg Büchner's', but Majut suggested in 1934 that it derived from Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). Benn has since pointed out that an almost exact parallel is to be found in Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro*; see 'Büchner and Gautier' (1973), pp. 205-07. In a recent archival note in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*, 52 (1978), p. 521, Thieberger draws attention to this same note of Büchner's, describing the manuscript page in detail, but making no mention of Majut or Benn. He writes as if the utterance is Büchner's own. Whether Büchner phrased the sentence himself, or whether he read it and copied it down, does not seem to me to be of crucial importance. Benn's derivation is convincing. It is interesting, however, that these few commentators all follow the line of Bergemann in regarding the note as a bitter or cynical utterance: see, for example, Benn: 'it would seem more probable that the cynical thought of his French apothegm occurred to him in Gießen itself, in the period of his most intense political anxieties, his most bitter disillusionment about the nature and destiny of man' (p. 205), and Thieberger: 'Sehr schmeichelhaft kommt das höhere Wesen Mensch hier freilich nicht weg ...Man könnte sich verleiten lassen diese Studentenkritzelei mit Büchners "Kulturpessimismus" in Verbindung zu bringen' (p. 521).
8. Camille, talking of Lucile: 'Der Himmel verheiß' ihr zu einer behaglichen fixen Idee. Die allgemeinen fixen Ideen, welche man die gesunde Vernunft tauft, sind unerträglich langweilig. Der glücklichste Mensch war der, welcher sich einbilden konnte, daß er Gott Vater, Sohn und heiliger Geist sey' (IV.5.70).
9. Letter to his family from Strasbourg, 1 January 1836 (II,452).
10. This is facilitated by Lehmann's presentation of the *Woyzeck* manuscripts in the order in which they were written: Erste Fassung, Szenengruppe 1 (H 1); Erste Fassung, Szenengruppe 2 (H 2); Verstreute Bruchstücke (H 3); Vorläufige Reinschrift (H 4) (I, 145-81). The two scenes 'Der Hof des Professors' and 'Der Idiot, das Kind, Woyzeck' are the only scenes whose place in the order of composition is, for Lehmann, still in doubt.
11. Lehmann's description of the last written version as a 'vorläufige Reinschrift' seems entirely appropriate. One cannot deduce simply from Büchner's note to his fiancée, '[Ich werde] in längstens acht Tagen *Leonce und Lena* mit noch zwei anderen Dramen erscheinen lassen' (II, 464), that the 'vorläufige Reinschrift' would necessarily have been Büchner's own last version of the play. Reconstructions of the play, based too rigidly on this notion, suffer from the loss of some interesting material from the earlier versions. This is the case in David G. Richards's recent reconstruction, where 'Der Hof des Professors', for example, and half of the scene 'Straße' (H 2, Scene 7), are quite unnecessarily sacrificed. See Richards, *Georg Büchners Woyzeck: Interpretation und Textgestaltung* (Bonn, 1975): argument and text are reprinted in English in Richards (1977), pp. 149-236.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

In references to *Dantons Tod* the numbers of the Act and Scene are given, as well as the page number in the first volume of Lehmann's edition. In references to other writings of Büchner, the volume- and page-number of Lehmann's edition is given.

In references to most books and articles, only the name of the author and page-number are given. When more than one work by an author has been cited, each is distinguished by its date.

### 1. EDITIONS OF GEORG BÜCHNER'S WORKS

- Dantons Tod. Dramatische Bilder aus Frankreichs Schrecken Herrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1835)
- Büchner, Ludwig (ed.), *Nachgelassene Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1850)
- Franzos, Karl Emil (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke und handschriftlicher Nachlaß* (Frankfurt am Main, 1879)
- Landau, Paul (ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1909) (Landau's introductory essays on Büchner's works are reprinted in Martens (1965), pp. 16-81.)
- Bergemann, Fritz (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Leipzig, 1922); *Briefe, Gesamtausgabe*, eighth edition (Wiesbaden, Leipzig, 1958)
- Jacobs, Margaret (ed.), *Dantons Tod and Woyzeck*, third revised edition (Manchester, 1971) (first edition 1954)
- Lehmann, Werner R. (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe mit Kommentar, Vol. I, Dichtungen und Übersetzungen mit Dokumentationen zur Stoffgeschichte (Hamburg, 1967); Vol. 2, Vermischte Schriften und Briefe (Hamburg, 1971) (No further volumes of this edition had appeared at the date of the completion of the present work.)

### 2. TRANSLATIONS OF DANTONS TOD

- Mueller, Richard, *Georg Büchner. Complete Plays and Prose* (New York, 1963)
- Price, Victor, *The Plays of Georg Büchner* (London, Oxford, New York, 1971)
- Schmidt, Henry J., *Georg Büchner. Danton's Death* (New York, 1971)
- Thieberger, Richard, *Georg Büchner. La Mort de Danton* (Paris, 1953)

### 3. BIBLIOGRAPHIES, RESEARCH SUMMARIES, COLLECTED ESSAYS, COMMENTARIES

- Arnold, Heinz Ludwig (ed.), *Georg Büchner I/II*, Text + Kritik, Sonderband (Munich, 1979)
- Bergemann, Fritz, 'Entwicklung und Stand der Georg Büchner Forschung', *Geistige Arbeit*, 4 (1937), Heft 8, 5-7
- 'Georg Büchner Schrifttum seit 1937', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, 25 (1951), 112-21
- Hinderer, Walter, *Büchner - Kommentar zum dichterischen Werk* (Munich, 1977)
- Knapp, Gerhard P., *Georg Büchner. Eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975)



- Georg Büchner, *Realien zur Literatur*, 159 (Stuttgart, 1977)  
 'Kommentierte Bibliographie zu Georg Büchner', in Arnold (1979), 426-55  
 Majut, Rudolf, 'Aufriß und Probleme der modernen Büchner-Forschung', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift*, 17 (1929), 356-72  
 Martens, Wolfgang, (ed.), *Georg Büchner, Wege der Forschung*, 53 (Darmstadt, 1965)  
 Mayer, Thomas Michael, 'Zu einigen neueren Tendenzen der Büchner-Forschung', in Arnold (1979), 327-56  
 Oppel, Horst, 'Stand und Aufgaben der Büchner-Forschung', *Euphorion*, 49 (1955), 91-109  
 Petersen, Klaus-Dietrich, 'Georg Büchner-Bibliographie', *Philobiblon*, 17 (1973), 89-115  
 Schlick, Werner, *Das Georg Büchner-Schrifttum bis 1965* (Hildesheim, 1968)  
 Thieberger, Richard, 'Situation de la Büchner-Forschung', *Études Germaniques*, 23 (1968), 255-60 and 405-13

#### 4. CRITICAL LITERATURE

- Specialized studies of individual works by Georg Büchner, other than *Dantons Tod*, are not included in this list.  
 Abutille, Carlo Mario, *Angst und Zynismus bei Georg Büchner* (Bern, 1969)  
 Bach, Anneliese, 'Verantwortlichkeit und Fatalismus in Georg Büchners Drama *Dantons Tod*', *Wirkendes Wort*, 6 (1955-56), 217-29  
 'Das dramatische Bild in Georg Büchners Tragödie *Dantons Tod*', in *Unterscheidung und Bewahrung, Festschrift für Hermann Kunisch* (Berlin, 1961), 1-11  
 Baumann, Gerhart, *Georg Büchner. Die dramatische Ausdruckswelt*, second, revised edition (Göttingen, 1976)  
 Baxandall, Lee, 'Georg Büchner's Danton's Death', *Tulane Drama Review*, 6 (1961-62), 136-49  
 Bell, Gerda E., 'Windows: A Study of a Symbol in Georg Büchner's Work', *Germanic Review*, 47 (1972), 95-108  
 Benn, Maurice B., 'Büchner and Gautier', *Seminar*, 9 (1973), 202-207  
*The Drama of Revolt. A Critical Study of Georg Büchner* (Cambridge, 1976)  
 Brunn, Walter L. von, 'Georg Büchner', *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 89 (1964), 1356-60  
 Büttner, Ludwig, *Georg Büchner. Revolutionär und Pessimist* (Nürnberg, 1948)  
*Büchners Bild vom Menschen* (Nürnberg, 1967)  
 Cowen, Roy C., 'Grabbe's *Don Juan und Faust* and Büchner's *Dantons Tod*: Epicureanism and Weltschmerz', *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 342-51  
 'Identity and Conscience in Büchner's Work', *Germanic Review*, 43 (1968), 258-65  
 David, Claude, 'Danton von Büchner aus gesehen', in Martens (1965), 323-33 (first published as 'Danton vu par Büchner', *Revue du Nord*, 36 (1954), 285-90)  
 Dolfini, Giorgio, *Il teatro di Georg Büchner* (Milan, 1961)  
 Fischer, Heinz, *Georg Büchner. Untersuchungen und Marginalien* (Bonn, 1972)  
 Frenzel, Elisabeth, 'Musset's *Lorenzaccio*: Ein mögliches Vorbild für Dantons *Tod*', *Euphorion*, 58 (1964), 59-68  
 Goltschnigg, Dietmar, *Materialien zur Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte Georg Büchners* (Kronberg/Taunus, 1974)  
*Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgeschichte Georg Büchners* (Kronberg/Taunus, 1975)  
 Grimm, Reinhold, 'Coeur und Carreau: Über die Liebe bei Georg Büchner', in Arnold (1979), 299-326  
 Gunkel, R., *Georg Büchner und der Dandysmus* (Utrecht, 1953)

- Hamburger, Michael, 'Georg Büchner', in *Reason and Energy: Studies in German Literature* (London, New York, 1957), 179-208
- Hauser, Ronald, *Georg Büchner* (New York, 1974)
- Helbig, Louis Ferdinand, *Das Geschichtsdrama Georg Büchners. Zitatprobleme und historische Wahrheit in Dantons Tod* (Bern, Frankfurt, 1973)
- Hinck, Walter, 'Georg Büchner', in *Deutsche Dichter des 19. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Benno von Wiese (Berlin, 1969), 200-222
- Höllerer, Walter, 'Georg Büchner', in *Zwischen Klassik und Moderne* (Stuttgart, 1958), 100-42  
'Büchner: Dantons Tod', in *Das deutsche Drama vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart. Interpretationen*, Vol. II, edited by Benno von Wiese (Düsseldorf, 1968), 65-88
- Holmes, T.M., 'The Ideology of the Moderates in Büchner's *Dantons Tod*', *German Life and Letters*, N.S., 27 (1973-74), 93-100
- Jancke, Gerhard, *Georg Büchner. Genese und Aktualität seines Werkes. Einführung in das Gesamtwerk* (Kronberg, 1975)
- Jaspers, Anna, 'Georg Büchners Trauerspiel Dantons Tod' (unpublished dissertation, University of Marburg, 1922)
- Jens, Walter, 'Georg Büchner', in *Euripides. Büchner* (Pfullingen, 1964), pp. 35-49 (first published as 'Poesie und Medizin. Gedenkrede für Georg Büchner', *Neue Rundschau*, 75 (1964), 266-77)
- Johann, Ernst, *Georg Büchner in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten dargestellt* (Hamburg, 1958)
- Klotz, Volker, *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama* (Munich, 1960)
- Knight, A.H.J., *Georg Büchner* (London, New York, 1974) (first edition Oxford, 1951)
- Kobel, Erwin, *Georg Büchner. Das dichterische Werk* (Berlin, New York, 1974)
- Koopmann, Helmut, 'Dantons Tod und die antike Welt', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 84 (1965), Sonderheft, 22-41
- Krapp, Helmut, *Der Dialog bei Georg Büchner* (Munich, 1958)
- Lehmann, Werner R., 'Prolegomena zu einer historisch-kritischen Büchner-Ausgabe', in *Gratulatio. Festschrift für Christian Wegner*, (Hamburg, 1963), pp. 190-225  
'Robespierre – "ein impotenter Mahomet"? Geistes- und wirkungsgeschichtliche Beglaubigung einer neuen textkritischen Lesung', *Euphorion*, 57 (1963), 210-17  
*Textkritische Noten. Prolegomena zur Hamburger Büchner-Ausgabe* (Hamburg, 1967)
- Lindenberger, Herbert, *Georg Büchner* (Carbondale, 1964)
- Lipmann, Heinz, *Georg Büchner und die Romantik* (Munich, 1923)
- Lukács, Georg, 'Der faschistisch verfälschte und der wirkliche Georg Büchner. Zu seinem 100. Todestag am 19 Februar 1937', in Martens (1965), 197-224 (first published 1937). Also in Georg Lukács, *Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, Bern, 1951), 66-88. Also in *Deutsche Literatur in zwei Jahrhunderten, Werke*, Vol. VII (Neuwied, Berlin, 1964), 249-272
- Maclean, H., 'The Moral Conflict in Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*', *AUMLA*, 6(1957), 25-33
- Majut, Rudolf, 'Büchner and Gautier', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, 165 (1934), pp.235-39
- Martens, Wolfgang, 'Zum Menschenbild Georg Büchners. *Woyzeck* und die Marionszene in *Dantons Tod*', in Martens (1965), 373-85 (first published in *Wirkendes Wort*, 8 (1957-58), 13-20)  
'Ideologie und Verzweiflung, Religiöse Motive in Büchners Revolutionsdrama', in Martens (1965), 406-42 (first published *Euphorion*, 54 (1960), 83-108)
- Mayer, Hans, *Georg Büchner und seine Zeit*, second edition (Wiesbaden, 1960) (first edition 1946, new enlarged edition, Frankfurt am Main, 1972)

- Michelsen, Peter, 'Die Präsenz des Endes. Georg Büchners *Dantons Tod*', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, 52 (1978), 476-95
- Mühlher, Robert, 'Georg Büchner und die Mythologie des Nihilismus', in Martens (1965), 252-88 (first published in *Dichtung der Krise. Mythos und Psychologie in der Dichtung des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 1951), 97-145)
- Müller, Gerd, 'Büchner und die Analyse der Revolution. Bemerkungen zu *Dantons Tod*', in *Literatur und Revolution* (Uppsala, 1974), 49-58
- Müller-Seidel, Walter, 'Natur und Naturwissenschaft im Werk Georg Büchners', in *Festschrift für Klaus Ziegler* (Tübingen, 1968), 205-32
- Parry, Idris, 'Foam on the Wave', in *Animals of Silence* (London, 1972), 42-51
- Paul, Ulrike, *Vom Geschichtsdrama zur politischen Diskussion: Über die Desintegration von Individuum und Geschichte bei Georg Büchner und Peter Weiss* (Munich, 1974)
- Peacock, Ronald, 'A Note on Büchner's Plays', in *The Poet in the Theatre* (New York, 1960), 181-93 (first published in *German Life and Letters*, N.S. 10 (1956-57), 189-97, German translation in Martens (1965), 360-72)
- Petersen, Jürgen, 'Die Aufhebung der Moral im Werk Georg Büchners', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, 47 (1973), 245-66
- Pongs-Andersson, Frida, *Die Tragödie Georg Büchners* (Marburg, 1975) (dissertation, Strasbourg, 1916)
- Richards, David G., *Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama* (Albany, 1977)
- Roche, Reinhard, 'stilus demagogicus. Beobachtungen an Robespierres Rede im Jakobinerklub', *Wirkendes Wort*, 14 (1964), 244-54
- Schmidt, Henry J., *Satire, Caricature and Perspectivism in the Works of Georg Büchner* (The Hague, Paris, 1970)
- Schmidt-Henkel, Gerhard, '*Dantons Tod*', in *Mythos und Dichtung* (Bad Homberg, Berlin, Zürich, 1967), 46-55
- Schonauer, Franz, 'Das Drama und die Geschichte. Versuch über Georg Büchner', *Deutsche Rundschau*, 87 (1963), 533-50
- Sengle, Friedrich, 'Grabbe und Büchner', in *Das deutsche Geschichtsdrama. Geschichte eines literarischen Mythos* (Stuttgart, 1952), 121-34
- Sieß, Jürgen, *Zitat und Kontext bei Georg Büchner. Eine Studie zu den Dramen 'Dantons Tod' und 'Leonce und Lena'* (Göppingen, 1976)
- Solomon, Janis L., 'Büchner's *Dantons Tod*: History as Theatre', *Germanic Review*, 54 (1979), 9-19
- Stern, J.P., 'A World of Suffering: Georg Büchner', in *Re-interpretations: Seven Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature* (London, New York, 1964), 78-155
- 'Georg Büchner: Potsherds of Experience', in *Idylls and Realities, Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature* (London, Southampton, 1971), 33-48
- Szondi, Peter, '*Dantons Tod*', in *Versuch über das Tragische* (Frankfurt am Main, 1961)
- Thieberger, Richard, 'Büchner-Miszelle. Was den Menschen vom Tier unterscheidet', *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, 52 (1978), 521
- Thorn Prikker, Jan, *Revolutionär ohne Revolution. Interpretation der Werke Georg Büchners* (Stuttgart, 1978)
- Viëtor, Karl, 'Die Tragödie des heldischen Pessimismus. Über Büchners Drama *Dantons Tod*', in Martens (1965), 98-137 (first published in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 12 (1934), 173-209)
- 'Georg Büchner. Politik, Dichtung, Wissenschaft' (Bern, 1949)
- Wells, G.A. 'Büchner as Tragedian', in *Erfahrung und Überlieferung, Festschrift für C.P. Magill* (Cardiff, 1974), 100-12

- Werner, Fritz, 'Georg Büchners Drama *Dantons Tod* und das Problem der Revolution', *Die Welt als Geschichte*, 12 (1952), 167-76
- Wessell, Leonard P., 'Eighteenth-Century Theodicy and the Death of God in Büchner's *Dantons Tod*', *Seminar*, 8 (1972), 198-218
- White, John S., 'Georg Büchner or The Suffering through the Father', *The American Imago*, 9 (1952), 365-427
- Wiese, Benno von, 'Georg Büchner. Die Tragödie des Nihilismus', in *Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel*, seventh edition (Hamburg, 1967), 513-34
- Wittkowski, Wolfgang, 'Georg Büchners Argernis', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schilergesellschaft*, 17 (1973), 362-83
- Georg Büchner. Persönlichkeit, Weltbild, Werk* (Heidelberg, 1978)
- Zabeltitz, Max Zobel von, *Georg Büchner. Sein Leben und sein Schaffen* (Bonn, 1915)
- Zons, Raimar St., *Georg Büchner. Dialektik der Grenze* (Bonn, 1976)

## 5. HISTORICAL SOURCES OF *DANTONS TOD*

### (a) *Studies of Historical Sources*

- Beck, Adolf, 'Unbekannte französische Quellen für *Dantons Tod* von Georg Büchner', in *Forschung und Deutung* (Frankfurt am Main, Bonn, 1966), 345-93 (first published in *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*, 23 (1963), 489-538)
- Mayer, Thomas, 'Zur Revision der Quellen für *Dantons Tod* von Georg Büchner', *Studi Germanici*, 7 (1969), 287-336 and 9 (1971), 223-33
- Thieberger, Richard, 'Texte des sources', in *La Mort de Danton* (Paris, 1953) pp. 35-52
- Viëtor, Karl, 'Die Quellen von Büchners Drama *Dantons Tod*', *Euphorien*, 34 (1933), 357-79
- Zöllner, Bernd, 'Büchners *Dantons Tod* und das Menschen- und Geschichtsbild in den Revolutionsgeschichten von Thiers und Mignet' (unpublished dissertation, University of Kiel, 1972)

### (b) *Historical Sources under Investigation*

- Almanach des prisons, ou anecdotes sur le régime intérieur de la Conciergerie, du Luxembourg etc., et sur différents prisonniers*, third edition (Paris, 1794-95)
- Desmoulins, Camille, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, in the series Collection des mémoires relatifs à la Révolution française, edited by St. A. Berville and J.J. Barrière (Paris, 1825)
- Le Vieux Cordelier*, seule édition complète, précédée d'un essai sur la vie et les écrits de l'auteur, par M. Matton aîné, parent de Camille Desmoulins et possesseur de ses manuscrits (Paris, 1834)
- Galerie historique des contemporains, ou nouvelle biographie*, seule édition, dans laquelle se trouvent réunis les hommes morts ou vivans, de toutes les nations, qui se sont fait remarquer à la fin du 18me siècle et au commencement de celui-ci, par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes, 8 vols (Brussels, 1817 ff.)
- Mercier, L.S., *Le nouveau Paris*, 6 vols (Paris, 1797)
- Mignet, F.A., *Histoire de la Révolution française depuis 1789 jusqu'en 1814*, 2 vols (Paris, 1824)
- Proussinale, M. de (Pierre Joseph Alexis Roussel), *Histoire secrète du Tribunal révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1815)
- Riouffe, Honoré, *Mémoires d'un détenu, pour servir à l'histoire de la tyrannie Robespierre*, in *Mémoires sur les prisons*, Vol. I, in the series Collection des

mémoires relatifs à la Révolution française, edited by St. A. Berville and J.J. Barrière (Paris, 1823) (first edition Paris, 1794-95) (all references are to the 1823 edition)

- Strahlheim, Carl (Johann Konrad Friedrich), *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit* (title of volume), *Unsere Zeit oder geschichtliche Übersicht der merkwürdigsten Ereignisse von 1789-1830 nach den vorzüglichsten französischen (englischen und deutschen) Werken von einem ehemaligen Officier der Kaiserlich-Französischen Armee* (title of *Hefl*) (Stuttgart, 1826-30) (referred to as *Unsere Zeit*; unless otherwise indicated, references are to Vol. XII)
- Thiers, L.A., *Histoire de la Révolution française*, 10 vols (Paris, 1823-27) (unless otherwise indicated, references are to Vol. VI)
- Vilate, J., *Causes secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor*, in the series Collection des mémoires relatifs à la Révolution française, edited by St. A. Berville and J.J. Barrière (Paris, 1825) (same volume as Camille Desmoulins, above; the volumes in this series are unnumbered)

## 6. BÜCHNER'S SCIENCE

### (a) *Writings on Büchner's Science*

- Bierbach, J.W., 'Der Anatom Georg Büchner und die Naturphilosophen' (unpublished dissertation, Medical Academy of Düsseldorf, 1961)
- Brunn, Walter L. von, 'Georg Büchner', *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 89 (1964), 1356-60
- Döhner, Otto, 'Georg Büchners Naturauffassung' (unpublished dissertation, University of Marburg, 1967)
- Ebner, Fritz, *Georg Büchner. Ein Genius der Jugend* (Darmstadt, 1964)
- Golz, Jochen, 'Die naturphilosophischen Anschauungen Georg Büchners', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena*, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, 13 (1964) 65-72
- Helmig, Hermann, *Der Morphologe Georg Büchner 1813-1837* (Basel, 1950)
- Jens, Walter, 'Georg Büchner', in *Euripides. Büchner* (Pfullingen, 1964), pp. 35-49 (first published as 'Poesie und Medizin: Gedenkrede für Georg Büchner', *Neue Rundschau*, 75 (1964), 266-77)
- Kerner, Dieter, 'In memoriam Georg Büchner. Zu seinem 150. Geburtstag am 17. Oktober 1963', *Deutsches Medizinisches Journal*, 14 (1963), 655-61
- Mette, Alexander, 'Medizin und Morphologie in Büchners Schaffen', *Sinn und Form*, 15 (1963), 747-55
- Müller, Johannes, Review of Georg Büchner, 'Mémoire sur le système nerveux du barbeau', in *Archiv für Anatomie, Physiologie und wissenschaftliche Medizin* (1937), Jahresberichte, LXIII-LXXVII
- Müller-Seidel, Walter, 'Natur und Naturwissenschaft im Werk Georg Büchners', in *Festschrift für Klaus Ziegler* (Tübingen, 1968), 205-32
- Rath, Gernot, 'Nachwort' to *Georg Büchner, 'Über Schädelnerven'* (Munich, 1965)
- Strohl, Jean, *Lorenz Oken und Georg Büchner, Zwei Gestalten aus der Übergangszeit von Naturphilosophie zu Naturwissenschaft* (Zürich, 1936)
- Weinberger, M.H., 'Georg Büchner. Arzt-Revolutionär-Dichter. Zu seinem 150. Geburtstag am 17. Oktober 1963', *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 105 (1963), 2353-55

### (b) *Selected Writings of Contemporary and Near-Contemporary Scientists*

- Cabanis, P.J.G., *Coup d'oeil sur les révolutions et sur la réforme de la médecine* (Paris, 1804)  
*Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, précédés d'une table analytique par M. le Comte Destutt de Tracy (Paris, 1824)

- Cuvier, Georges, *Discours sur les révolutions de la surface du globe et sur les changements qu'elles ont produits dans le règne animal*, fifth edition (Paris, 1828)
- Desmoulins, Antoine, *Anatomie des systèmes nerveux des animaux à vertèbres, appliquée à la physiologie et à la zoologie*, Ouvrage dont la parti physiologique est faite conjointement avec F. Magendie (Paris, 1825)
- Destutt, A.L.C., Comte de Tracy, *Éléments d'Idéologie* (Paris, 1801-18)
- Kaup, J.J., *Skizzierte Entwicklungsgeschichte und natürliches System der europäischen Thierwelt* (Darmstadt, Leipzig, 1829)
- Magendie, François, *Précis élémentaire de physiologie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1816-17)
- Müller, Johannes, *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen* (Coblenz, 1833-40)
- Oken, Lorenz, *Die Zeugung* (Bamberg, 1805)
- Über die Bedeutung der Schädelknochen. Ein Programm beym Antritt der Professur an der Universität zu Jena (Jena, 1807)
- Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie (Jena, 1809)
- Lehrbuch der Physiologie (Jena, 1809-11)
- Vogt, Carl, *Physiologische Briefe für Gebildete aller Stände* (Stuttgart, Tübingen, 1845-47)
- (See also below, Ernst Büchner and Ludwig Büchner)

(c) *Selected Writings on Scientific Background*

- Greene, John C., *The Death of Adam. Evolution and its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, Iowa, 1959)
- Gregory, Frederick, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Dordrecht-Holland, Boston, 1977)
- Probst, Christian, 'Johann Bernhard Wilbrand (1799-1846) und die Physiologie der Romantik', *Südoffs Archiv*, 50 (1966), 157-78
- Rothschuh, K.E., *Geschichte der Physiologie* (Berlin, Göttingen, Heidelberg, 1953) (Sections on 'Das romantische Zwischenspiel in der Physiologie', 94-101, and 'Die empirische Richtung in der Physiologie am Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts', 101-11)
- Temkin, Owsei, 'The Philosophical Background of Magendie's Philosophy', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 20 (1946), 10-35
- 'Materialism in French and German Physiology of the Early Nineteenth Century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 20 (1946), 322-27

7. THE BÜCHNER FAMILY: SELECTED WRITINGS

- Bousset, Alice, *Zwei Vorkämpferinnen für Frauenbildung: Luise Büchner, Marie Calm* (Hamburg, 1893)
- Büchner, Anton, *Die Familie Büchner. Georg Büchners Vorfahren, Eltern und Geschwister* (Darmstadt, 1963)
- Büchner, Ernst, 'Versuchter Selbstmord durch Verschlucken von Stecknadeln', *Zeitschrift für die Staatsarzneikunde*, 6 (1823), 305-48
- 'Beobachtung einer glücklich abgelaufenen Selbst-Entmannung', *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jahrbücher für Medicin und Chirurgie*, 8 (1824), 1. Stück, 57-71
- 'Beobachtung und Operations-Geschichte eines sogenannten Blutschwamms, Fungus haematodes', *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jahrbücher für Medicin und Chirurgie*, 8 (1824), 2. Stück, 123-39
- 'Beobachtungen über den Tripper beim männlichen Geschlecht', *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jahrbücher für Medicin und Chirurgie*, 10 (1825), 3. Stück, 21-31
- 'Gutachten über den Gemüthszustand eines Soldaten im Augenblick seines Vergehens im Dienste, durch thätliches Vergreifen am Vorgesetzten', *Zeitschrift für die Staatsarzneikunde*, 10 (1825), 39-72
- 'Ein decidirter Fall von Wasserscheu als Folge des Bisses eines tollen Hundes', *Rheinisch-Westfälische Jahrbücher für Medicin und Chirurgie*, 11 (1826), 2. Stück, 141-56

- Büchner Ludwig, *Kraft und Stoff. Empirisch-philosophische Studien in allgemeinverständlicher Darstellung*, fifteenth revised edition (Leipzig, 1883) (first edition, Frankfurt am Main, 1855)  
*Der neue Hamlet. Poesie und Prosa aus den Papieren eines verstorbenen Pessimisten* (Gießen, 1885) (contains a fragment of an autobiographical sketch)  
*Im Dienste der Wahrheit* (Gießen, 1900) (with an introductory essay on the life of Ludwig Büchner by his brother, Alexander)
- Büchner, Luise, *Die Frauen und ihr Beruf. Ein Büch der weiblichen Erziehung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1856)  
*Aus dem Leben. Erzählungen aus Heimat und Fremde* (Leipzig, 1861)  
*Das Schloß zu Wimmis* (Leipzig, 1864)  
*Frauenherz. Gedichte*, second edition (Hamm, 1864)  
*Praktische Versuche zur Lösung der Frauenfrage* (Berlin, n.d. [1870])  
*Deutsche Geschichte 1815-1870* (Leipzig, 1875)  
*Die Frau. Hinterlassene Aufsätze, Abhandlungen und Berichte zur Frauenfrage* (Halle, 1878)  
*Nachgelassene belletristische und vermischte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1878)  
*Ein Dichter. Novellenfragment mit Georg Büchners Cato-Rede*, edited by Anton Büchner (Darmstadt, 1965)
- Joeres, Ruth-Ellen Boettcher, 'Ein Dichter: an Introduction to the World of Louise Büchner', *German Quarterly*, 52 (1979), 32-49

## INDEX OF NAMES

References to participants in the French Revolution included in this index are references to historical personages, not to characters in *Dantons Tod*.

- Abutille, Carlo Maria, 16, 21  
Arnold, Heinz Ludwig, 114n, 115n
- Bach, Anneliese, 98, 123n, 125n  
Barère de Vieuzac, Bertrand, 35–38, 115n, 118n, 119n  
Baumann, Gerhart, 93  
Beaumarchais, Pierre Augustin Caron de, 126n  
Beck, Adolf, 3, 30, 113n, 117n, 119n  
Becker, August, 125n  
Benn, Maurice, 16–17, 21–22, 53, 58, 84, 93, 114n, 118n, 124n, 126n  
Bentham, Jeremy, 79, 82  
Bergemann, Fritz, 22, 108, 125n, 126n  
Bierbach, J. W., 114n  
Billaud-Varennes, Jacques Nicolas, 35–36  
Boeckel, Eugen, 104  
Brissot de Warville, Jacques Pierre, 115n  
Brongniart, Alexandre, 121n  
Brunn, W. L. von, 20, 114n  
Büchner, Ernst Karl (father of Georg Büchner), 18, 61, 104–05, 108, 116n, 118n, 121n, 126n  
Büchner, Georg:  
    Works: *Dantons Tod*, passim  
    *Der Hessische Landbote*, 10, 12, 100, 104, 115n  
    *Lenz*, 2, 112  
    *Leonce und Lena*, 26–27, 112, 126n  
    Philosophische Schriften, 76  
    Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften, 64–66, 109, 114n, 122n  
    *Woyzeck*, 9, 111–12, 126n  
Büchner, Louise Caroline (mother of Georg Büchner), 117n  
Büchner, Luise (sister of Georg Büchner), 27, 117n, 118n, 124n  
Büchner, Ludwig (brother of Georg Büchner), 20, 78, 94, 117n, 123n, 124n  
Büchner, Wilhelm (brother of Georg Büchner), 114n, 125n  
Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de, 121n  
Büttner, Ludwig, 22, 58
- Cabanis, Pierre Jean Georges, 19–20, 22, 79, 117n  
Chaumette, Pierre Gaspard, 77, 122n, 123n  
Clarus, Johann Christian August, 116  
Cloutz, Anacharsis, 77, 80, 123n  
Collingwood, Robin George, 67, 122n  
Collot d'Herbois, Jean Marie, 35–36  
Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de, 79  
Corday, Charlotte, 117n  
Couthon, Georges, 116n, 120n  
Cuvier, Georges, 60–61, 65, 121n
- Danton, Georges Jacques, 7, 14–15, 41, 43, 67, 71–74, 87–91, 101, 115n, 116n, 120n, 121n, 122n  
Danton, Louise, see Gély, Louise  
Darwin, Charles, 66–68, 117n, 121n, 122n  
David, Claude, 100, 124n  
Democritus, 94  
Desmoulins, Antoine, 20–21, 117n  
Desmoulins, Camille, 24, 30–33, 43, 51, 71, 77, 113n, 118n, 119n, 120n  
Desmoulins, Lucille, 24, 27, 117n  
Destutt de Tracy, Antoine Louis Claude, Comte, 116–17n



- Döhner, Otto, 114n, 121n  
 Dolfini, Giorgio, 2, 89–90, 119n, 124n  
 Duller, Eduard, 13  
 Dumas, René François, 35–36, 119n
- Empedocles, 94  
 Epicurus, 78–79, 94, 103
- Fantoni, Sergio, 118n  
 Fouquier-Tinville, Antoine Quentin, 35–36, 119n  
 Franzos, Karl Emil, 125n  
 Froiep. Ludwig Friedrich von, 121n
- Gautier, Théophile, 126n  
 Gély, Louise, 22, 117n  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 61, 64–65, 122n  
 Golz, Jochen, 114n  
 Greene, John C., 66, 121n, 122n  
 Grimm, Reinhold, 116n  
 Guerrieri, Gerardo, 114n  
 Gunkel, R., 103, 125n  
 Gutzkow, Karl, 13, 105–06, 125n
- Harleß, Johann Christian Friedrich, 116n  
 Hébert, Jacques René, 7, 24, 31, 43, 46–47, 71, 115n, 120n, 121n, 122n  
 Helbig, Louis Ferdinand, 114n  
 Helmig, Hermann, 114n  
 Henke, Adolf, 116n  
 Herman, Martial Joseph Armand, 35–36, 119n  
 Hobbes, Thomas, 79  
 Höllerer, Walter, 117–118n  
 Holmes, T. M., 30, 33
- Jacobs, Margaret, 13, 62, 76, 83, 93, 115n, 124n  
 Jaeglé, Louise Wilhelmine (Minna), 22, 26, 50, 117n, 118n, 120n  
 Jancke, Gerhard, 114n  
 Jaspers, Anna, 24, 113n, 117n  
 Jens, Walter, 116n, 121n  
 Joeres. Ruth-Ellen Boetcher, 118n
- Kaup, Johann Jakob, 61, 65, 121n  
 Knapp, Gerhard P., 1, 113n, 114n, 118n  
 Knight, Arthur H. J., 9, 12, 16, 56, 58, 60, 63–64, 107, 115n, 118n, 121n, 123n  
 Kobel, Erwin, 114n, 124n  
 Krapp, Helmut, 98, 125n
- Laflotte, 39, 58, 119n  
 Lamarck, Jean Baptiste de Monet, Chevalier de, 61, 65  
 Landau, Paul, 116n, 121n  
 Laplace, Pierre Simon, Marquis de, 79  
 Lehmann, Werner R., 113n, 121n, 125n, 126n  
 Lindenberger, Herbert, 27, 58  
 Locke, John, 19, 79  
 Luck, Ludwig Wilhelm, 125n  
 Lucretius, 94  
 Lukács, Georg, 22, 44–45, 58, 99–100, 125n
- Maclean, H., 115n, 118n  
 Magendie, François, 18–21, 64, 103, 116n, 117n, 122n  
 Majut, Rudolf, 126n  
 Marivaux, Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de, 73  
 Martens, Wolfgang, 16, 116n, 121n, 126n  
 Mayer, Hans, 22, 63–64, 67, 70, 75–76, 80, 101–03, 107, 114n, 118n, 122n, 124n, 125n

- Mayer, Thomas Michael, 3, 113n, 114n, 116n, 117n, 119n, 120n  
 Mercier, Louis Sebastien, 12, 70, 72–73, 113n, 115n  
 Michelsen, Peter, 114n, 121n  
 Mignet, François Auguste Marie, 11–12, 37–38, 48, 72, 88–89, 113n, 114n, 115n, 117n, 120n, 122n, 123n  
 Minnigerode, Karl, 104, 125n  
 Mueller, Richard, 121n  
 Müller, Johannes, 122n  
 Müller-Seidel, Walter, 5, 64, 97, 115n, 121n, 124n  
  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 66, 122n  
  
 Oberlin, Jean Frédéric, 2  
 Oken, Lorenz, 61, 64–65, 95–96, 114n, 121n, 122n  
  
 Paine, Thomas, 76, 119n, 123n  
 Pascal, Blaise, 124n  
 Peacock, Ronald, 1, 41–42, 85–86, 91, 95, 97, 99–101, 113n  
 Petersen, Jürgen, 29, 81, 118n  
 Pongs, Hermann, 113n  
 Pongs-Andersson, Frida, 113n  
 Price, Victor, 121n  
 Probst, Christian, 124n  
 Proussinalle, M. de (Pierre Joseph Alexis Roussel), 113n, 119n  
  
 Richards, David G., 126n  
 Riouffe, Honoré, 27–28, 51, 71–72, 74, 77, 110, 113n, 115n, 118n, 122n, 123n  
 Ritter, J. W., 122n  
 Robespierre, Maximilien, 7, 10, 13, 15, 31, 41, 43, 45–49, 53, 71, 77, 87, 101–02, 115n, 119n, 120n, 121n, 123n  
 Roche, Reinhard, 120n  
 Roland de la Platière, Jeanne Manon Philpon (Madame Roland), 117n, 122n  
 Ronsin, Charles Philippe, 31, 119n  
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 43  
 Rudé, George, 123n  
 Rust, Johann Nepomuk, 116n  
  
 Saint-Just, Louis Antoine, 14, 35, 46–48, 54, 58–59, 101–02, 119n, 120n  
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm, 64–65  
 Schmidt, Henry J., 21, 36, 119n, 121n  
 Schmidt, Julian, 101, 103, 125n  
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 67  
 Sengle, Friedrich, 1, 113n, 114n  
 Sieß, Jürgen, 114n, 119n  
 Spencer, Herbert, 122n  
 Spinoza, Baruch, 76, 78, 103  
 Stern, J. P., 26, 75, 93, 96–97  
 Stöber, Adolph, 104  
 Stöber, August, 104  
 Strahlheim, Carl (Johann Konrad Friedrich, *Unsere Zeit*), 11, 15, 37, 41, 43, 46–48, 51, 54, 72, 88, 113n, 115n, 118n, 119n, 120n  
 Strohl, Jean, 114n  
  
 Temkin, Owsei, 117n  
 Thieberger, Richard, 3, 15, 113n, 115n, 120n, 123n, 126n  
 Thiers, Adolphe, 11–12, 15, 22, 30–33, 35, 45–46, 53–55, 58–59, 71–73, 87–91, 101, 113n–124n (passim)  
 Treitschke, Heinrich von, 99, 125n  
  
*Unsere Zeit*, See Strahlheim, Carl  
  
 Viëtor, Karl, 3, 16, 18, 22, 44, 58, 68, 84, 91, 99, 113n, 114n, 115n, 116n, 117n, 120n, 124n, 125n

- Vilate, Joachim, 119n  
Vincent, François Nicholas, 31  
Vogt, Karl, 20, 117n
- Weber, Ernst Heinrich, 121n  
Weidig, Friedrich Ludwig, 13, 101, 104  
Wells, George A., 87, 89, 109  
White, John S., 26, 118n  
Wiese, Benno von, 125n  
Wilbrand, Johann B., 96, 122n, 124n  
Wittkowski, Wolfgang, 81–83, 123n  
Wordsworth, William, 96
- Zöllner, Bernd, 12, 114n, 123n

