

CITADEL OF REASON

Christa Wolf's speech on receiving the Büchner Prize in October 1980

Translated by Barbara Einhorn

I would like to thank the German Academy for Language and Literature in Darmstadt for awarding me the Büchner Prize this year. Such an occasion tends to increase dramatically a writer's dissatisfaction with her own work; self-doubts continue to grow about one's chosen way of life. I shall pass over my endless agonising on this subject as futile or perhaps even vain. I shall also put aside those pages which reflect the difficulty I feel about speaking here and now. With Büchner's example before me, I feel more uneasy than ever about the undercurrents which weave together writing and living, responsibility and guilt, and which simultaneously bring forth and threaten to tear apart the person who lives by writing, writes by living. These contradictory currents must, I now believe, be not merely endured, but accepted. To be innocent and without responsibility is wishful thinking which arises at times of weakness; it is escapist thinking. There is no room for a state of innocence without responsibility in the concrete circumstances in which we live, write and become **mature**—which also implies having one's eyes opened. For these are circumstances in which we intervene, fail, protest anew and become obsessed with new experiences. Here and now! is the order of the day and the masks are torn from our faces as we go. *Will our faces come away with them?*¹⁰

Rereading Büchner makes us see our own situation in sharper focus. *I accustomed my eyes to the sight of blood, but I am no guillotine blade.*" The Germans' arduous, frequently dislocated, often halting or violent and at times desolate progress through history could be paved and punctuated by the words of their great writers. I intended to give a speech in Büchner's words which would sound as if it were written today. But it is impossible to make up for what remained unfinished in his time.

Büchner himself would never have had to face the embarrassment of delivering a public speech of thanks. By what right do we refer to the phenomenon and the work of this very young man who—as a revolutionary, poet and scientist—risked everything to prise a bearable alternative from the bleak circumstances of his era, whose feverishly sober dialogues and clear-sighted, urgent prose must have been dragged from him by the most terrible suffering. *The pain began bringing him to his senses. He spoke rapidly but was in torment.*

The consciousness which emerges from the pain of insanity is not his former consciousness. The tortured language it has to use in order to find itself is alien to him. **Lenz**¹² goes mad as a result of losing touch with common sense. Disillusioned through and through, we stand dumbfounded in the face of the reified dreams produced by that form of instrumental thought which still calls itself rational, but which has long since lost sight of its emancipatory Enlightenment origins in the notion of education for responsibility. This 'rationalism' has entered the industrial age in the form of an unmitigated mania for expediency. The metaphor of the magic broom, now a harmless fairy **tale**,¹³ was at first sufficient warning. Later, once the profit motive merged with technical progress, acts of violence became masked by the motto: 'All's fair in love and war'. Bourgeois literature, seriously disorientated by this, crafted the image of blind old Faust, who in a grotesque act of self-deception adapts the sound of spades digging his grave to fit his beatific vision of the **future**.¹⁴ This metaphor has only now really chilled us to the marrow—we who are the contemporaries of that civilisation which with the most insanelly short-circuited vision is directing everything it values most highly—money and technological perfection—to the production of its own destruction. We, who are the contemporaries too of that new Faust, the 'father of the atom bomb', whose humanistically shaped memory—even whilst he is blinded by the light brighter than a thousand suns—triggers lines from a sacred Indian epic poem: 'I am Death **who robs all/Destroyer of the worlds**.'¹⁵

What further misuse of literature must we witness? What more can happen before words fail us completely? To what lengths, into what manner of death will literature follow mankind as its official mourner? No longer giving counsel for life, but only for death? Fettered by a past which remains in large part not understood, spellbound in a present to which there is practically no alternative, filled with foreboding for the future—how should we speak? In the context of '**overkill**'¹⁶ will there be time for a new cycle of historical contradictions now just beginning to develop fully? What are the options for a literature whose language and forms express Western patterns of thought and behaviour, a literature whose structures, albeit formed in the portrayal of contradictions, yet are predicated on a productive relationship between human beings, a productive relationship that we can no longer count on: Whichever way it twists and turns, however much it may torment itself and rack its brains, must not this literature remain an accomplice to the process of increasing alienation and loss of touch with reality? Is its only choice one between crude and cunning deceptions? In the age of their mechanical reproduction, do not words themselves **turn** against their producers? And doesn't this age express what there is to be said about it in plastics, concrete and steel? Monstrous, forbidding, self-deceptive, this age exhibits a sheer force to which language cannot aspire. Should then the language of literature

fail us?

'May humanity be noble!'" and: 'A mistake was made in our creation.'" Fifty years separate Büchner's phrase from Goethe's. Büchner realised that paradox was the symbol of the dawning age. Hence his century, acting consistently, since it was ready to accept anything but that stigma, punished him with silence. He was confronted at a very early stage with that dearth of an opinion, that loss of certainty with which we are afflicted today and which brings in its wake revulsion at language. We have been deprived of a large body of words which we thought were indispensable, words of the category 'freedom', 'equality', 'fraternity', 'humanity', 'justice'. These words have been taken over by the press, since they express nothing, not even a belief corresponds to them any more. In terms of the logic of language, this means their opposites must also be dropped, since words like 'horrific', 'frightful', 'atrocious', 'ominous', 'barbaric' no longer suit the circumstances. Into their place, replacing all the well-informed, words, the judgmental, loud-mouthed or resigned words steps the quiet, unassuming phrase: out of joint.¹⁹

The times are out of joint, we say tentatively, and we feel: it is so. We could rise to defend that phrase. It's not a pretty one, it's simply right, and so gives our shattered sense of hearing a welcome break from the screech of big words. It also provides some measure of relief for our conscience, which is disturbed by too many false and misused words. Is it possible that it could be the first word of a different language, an appropriate language which already resounds in our ears but is not yet on the tip of our tongue? Perhaps it could lead to the development of a whole chain of further, similarly appropriate words—without our forgetting for a moment that naming is not rectifying, does not of itself redress or change anything—words which ought to express not merely the reverse of the old values, but a new and different sense of values, suited to the times. So that we would have something to say. We could talk to one another again without feeling ashamed.

Those who wish to embark on the search for this language would, however, have to be prepared to suffer the almost total loss of their sense of self and self-confidence. They would no longer have at their disposal a single familiar pattern of speech, conversation, thought or poetry. Indeed they would experience what it really means to lose your cool.

We are not the first. In the disjunctures between different eras much of what is a necessary part of the ability to speak is broken: courage, backbone, hope, immediacy. Fear springs into the resulting vacuum. Literary precursors nearly always anticipate a fear which later overcomes many.

Dance, Rosetta, dance, so that time may tick to the beat of your dear little feet. . .My feet would rather take me right out of time.

A rhythm which pounds its way into sleep, into dreams, which can transfix and obsess you. My feet would rather go right out of time.

Dance, Rosetta.

Rosetta dances. Sings: Oh, dear grief. Goes off, since Leonce simply doesn't love her, indeed is only capable of loving the corpse of their love. Tears, **Rosetta?—Must** be diamonds, they are piercing my eyes—Leonce, left alone, pronounces: *It's* a strange thing, love *is*.²⁰—**Meanwhile** his brother Danton proclaims on the neighbouring stage: *I* will retreat into the citadel of reason. **I** shall break forth with the cannon of truth and crush my enemies."

Where does that leave the women—Rosetta, Marie, Marion, Lena, Julie, **Lucile?**²² Outside the citadel, of course. Unprotected, in the direct line of fire. No thought construction encompasses them. They are made to believe that the only mode of rational thought is the entrenched one! And it is not just that they lack the education to think in this way; they simply don't wish to. From below, from outside they watch the man's strained mental activity which becomes, over time, increasingly directed towards strengthening his fortress by measurements, calculations, ingenious numerical and diagrammatic systems. It is intellectual activity which feels at home in the iciest abstraction and whose ultimate truth is the formula. How could Rosetta have the slightest idea that fear of being touched is what makes him withdraw from the fullness of reality; that it is his vulnerability and the fear of becoming aware of his vulnerability which drive him deep into his insane systems. Or that, robbed of his wholeness by the merciless division of labour, wounded and torn to shreds, he pushes himself at the most breakneck speeds solely to avoid embarking on precisely that 'hellish journey to self-knowledge' without which, according to Kant, there can be no reason. And that he who does not know himself is also incapable of knowing a woman.

Hence their ways part. Rosetta is silent. Loves. Suffers. Is murdered, as Marie. As Julie, follows her husband into death. Is driven mad, as Lucile. Sacrifices herself. Laments—now her name is Lena: Am I then like the defenceless pool which must reflect in its still depths every image which leans over it?²³—**One** of them, Marion the woman of pleasure, has obeyed the dictates of her own nature: that is the extent of Buchner's realism.

People were unable to read him. They did not want to know that the progress they were in the process of launching on a grand scale, comprised the stuff of new myths. That it could provide pleasure, but not love. And that its most powerful motivating force would be fear of its own inner emptiness. Buchner realised so very early—and I think with horror—that the pleasure the new age derived from itself was fundamentally linked with pleasure in destruction. But he did not live to see the fully-formed caricature of the paradox coupling creation with destruction. He was not acquainted with a word like 'mega deaths'. He endowed his characters with a love of death, but even he could not have imagined that a perfect,

if murderous, technical solution would be called 'sweet', or that women's names would be inscribed on the rumps of rockets. Buchner could not have conceived of the lengths to which his Leonce would go—once his hall of mirrors became too confining for him²⁴—purely in order to avoid being without a reflection. For the fear of death grips them—Leonce and his more powerful and more active descendants—the instant there is no mirror—a woman's eyes or body, a theatre, a corporation, a powerful organisation, a state of apparatus, the globe, the universe!—to throw back a larger-than-life reflection of them.

Oh, to be able to see oneself upside down.²⁵ Büchner, if anyone, must have known the desire to achieve the impossible: to make visible the blind spot in this culture. He circumscribes it with his characters, whom he pushes to the limits of what can be said. On one occasion he tries to express this with a scream—when Lucile loses her sanity at Camille's death. But 'that doesn't help, everything is just as before.'²⁶ A dramaturgy of screams is an absurdity in the theatre of relatively resolvable contradictions. It is impossible to portray on the stage that which would adequately convey the actual terms of existence. This was another issue Buchner had to confront. Consequently he created space in his 'either/or' dramaturgy—a dramaturgy he links loosely to the old dramatic structure so that people can go on believing they understand what they see. He made space for those phrases which are to be spoken tonelessly, a single breath before the scream: My feet would rather go right out of time.

Rosetta's fate is to remain invisible both to herself and to Leonce, to be speechless, deprived of substance, occupying precisely that disowned, soundproofed space which has been manipulated out of sight and which the world, to which after all she also belongs, is unable for the life of it to perceive. She becomes definable by that which she is not.

She allows herself to be robbed of her history. Lets her claim to a soul be disputed. Her claim to reason. To being a person. To having responsibility for herself. She allows herself to be married off. Serves her husband. Gives him heirs. Is made to believe him when he claims that the sensual pleasure he enjoys is denied her once and for all. She conceals her unhappiness. Dances. Hears his reproach: I want to sleep, but you insist on dancing.

Rosetta allows herself to be deprived of her rights. Of her right to speak. Of her right to grief. To joy. To love. To work. To art. Lets herself be raped. Prostituted. Imprisoned. Driven mad. Allows herself, as Rose, to be overworked, exploited: 'doubly', so it has been said.²⁷ Lets herself be forced into bearing children. Made to abort children. Allows her sexuality to be analysed away. Becomes enmeshed in nets of powerlessness. Becomes a pain in the neck. The hussy. The vamp. The housewife. Leaves the doll's house, as Nora.²⁸

Finally, when she is called Rosa, she begins to fight back. In return, she

is beaten to death and thrown into the canal. Persecuted, her rights are equal to those of the oppressed and persecuted man. Dance, Rosetta. She dances. Now her name is Marlene.—You want me to laugh? Sure, I'll laugh **then./You** want me to dance? Of course, any **time./You** want me to turn your heads? Don't mention it! It's my **pleasure.**²⁹

It's a strange thing, love. Rosetta under her many names allows herself to be utterly destroyed rather than admit to herself what is happening to her: namely that when the philosophising Leonce says: 'subject', he never ever means her, the real woman. That for him she has become just another object. That he therefore. . .

Here she stops herself. Is in no hurry for the final insight. Prefers **self-effacement**. Suppresses her talents. Succours under many names, some of which you will know well, the genius of the philosophising, poetising, painting man.—You do love me, don't **you, Leonce?—Well, why not?**³⁰—Whereupon she can become strange, hard as well, jealous, bitter. Cries out, screams at him. Becomes hysterical. Starts drinking. Turns on the gas.

After the wars, during which she took the man's place and proved her worth in his machinery of production and destruction, she gets to hear as the ultimate concession: that she is like him. So now she's out to prove it to him. She works like a man, that's progress. And it is progress of a kind. Stands beside him at the machine day and night. Sits beside him in the lecture theatre, in advisory and executive bodies (in the minority of course in these). Writes, paints, writes poetry like him—almost like him: for the first tiny cracks are beginning to appear, which they blame on her hypersensitivity; or not, as the case may be. To a certain extent she keeps within the grid for thinking and seeing drawn up by him. And to the forms in which he expresses his feelings about the world and his **world-weariness** as well. In this way she emerges from the blind spot and is discovered. Becomes printable. Review-worthy. A 'talent'. A name. Possibly even merits a prize.

Will anyone believe that she feels ambivalent? It did after all take a long time for her to understand herself. Why does she still feel so out of place; why can't she shake off the feeling that in their praise and criticism it is not her who is meant, but still someone else, the false picture of her, the 'other' woman. And that they have scarcely mentioned her at all so far.

Paradoxically—yes: for on entering the citadel she becomes subject to its laws!—paradoxically she herself had to foster this failure to see her for what she is. In order to become free, she has accepted new restrictions. For her to be able to come to herself, new forms of self-denial were appropriated from her. She had the best will in the world. Set her hopes on the scientific age. Trusted its rationality and now sees herself at the mercy of the irrationality it is cornered in and which it renders unassailable

by means of expert scientific reports. Never, she now admits to herself, never ever did time tick to the beat of *her* feet. Yet in a strangely insistent and at times even uncanny way she is now prepared to take herself seriously. It is at this point that she meets with opposition.

Up until now, whenever things became serious, she was always protectively sheltered from seriousness. They didn't bother her with the construction of weapons systems, additional and super weapons systems, which spell the end for old-fashioned individual death. In its place, in the fantasy of nuclear planning bodies, these weapons systems have already irradiated, incinerated and reduced each of us to ashes seven, eight, twenty times over. They didn't initiate her—Rosetta by her many names—into the secret purpose of their global economic, political and military strategies. She sees the preserver of the balance of terror sitting washed out in front of the television every evening, observes the planner of distorted economic growth drifting towards a heart attack, watches the distributor of worldwide hunger reaching for the bottle, exhausted. They're working not only themselves to death.

Dance, Rosetta, dance.

But now—admittedly late, perhaps too late—she raises her voice. Asks: gentlemen, friends, colleagues, comrades: Don't you think the earth's crust has become rather thin even for light feet by *now?*³¹

She shouldn't have spoken like that. Now she has become really ungrateful. She's dancing out of line. Letting herself slip through the net of her powerlessness—as if this were a pleasure trip which she could indulge in or not, as the fancy took her!—out through the net whose stitches were after all very finely meshed, of stuff such as dreams are made of: the nightmares of alienated thought processes.

The fear which sets in at this *point*.

Hers *and* his fear: for now they share the dreadful secret, the taboo of taboos: that Leonce by his many names is incapable of loving, that he is no longer able to love anything but dead matter. (*Beautiful corpse, you rest so sweetly on the black bier cloth of night that nature abhors life and falls in love with death.*)³² Does that leave her, Rosetta by her many names, only the choice of being pushed back into the dead space or becoming like him? Doesn't each step she takes towards her liberation increase his fear and thus his resistance? Should *she* now entrench herself and shoot from the citadel of her reason 'with the cannon of truth'? Regard him as her enemy, to be 'crushed'? And: together, bringing each other to their senses: shouldn't that be possible? Couldn't the two of them, locked in the same paradox, take a single step towards one another? Was this historical moment also to be lost?

This is where the old beat starts up again, particularly in the night, loudly, very loudly indeed: My feet would rather go right out of time. That's when fantasies are sparked off, under the threshold of consciousness,

where the constant threat triggers a constant alarm, constantly seeking viable alternatives—fantasies fed too by the moral dilemmas of him or her who is compelled to write. Writing on this paper-thin crust? No longer 'in hope' but only in preparation for the 'state of emergency'?

'Nothing pleases me any more'—thus begins Ingeborg Bachmann's last poem.

Should I
Embellish a metaphor
With an almond blossom?

...

Should I
Fetter a thought
Imprison it in a well-lit sentence cell?
Titivate eye and ear
With first-rate tit-bits of words?

The poem ends:

(Should. The others should.)
My part should be **lost**.³³

That is language beyond belief. But it is still language nevertheless. A metaphor is used to renounce metaphors, the lines which dissociate themselves from first-rate tit-bits of words are themselves of the highest quality. The poem which renounces art is itself of necessity a work of art. Almost every product of this era carries within itself the seed of its own destruction, or at the very least within the counter-product invented to complement it. Art is unable to cancel itself out as art, literature can not do away with itself as literature. A person who expresses herself fully is unable to rid herself of art or literature: the wish to be rid of them remains as testimony. Her part will not be lost.

Books can burn: the lesson has sunk in deep. Literature, despairing and weary of itself as it may be, must yet persist, indeed must overcome this despair and self-disgust. Assuming it is not lost by its authors going away: to another country, into another profession, taking on a different name, retreating into illness, into insanity, into death—all of these metaphors for silence when they happen to writers: Being silenced. Choosing silence. Having to be silent. Finally, being permitted to be silent.

But—and you should visualise a long silence before this but, a silence whose colour, if it had one, would be black—despite the fact that the three languages of politics, science and literature which **Büchner** managed to combine in his one person, admittedly by a super-human exertion of body and soul, have since then drifted hopelessly far apart from one

another: the language of literature appears, strangely enough, to be the one which most closely approximates the reality of humanity at this time, however much this may be disputed by statistics, numerical codes, standardisation and performance tables. Perhaps this is so because moral courage on the part of the author—the courage to risk self-knowledge—is an ingredient in literature. Or maybe it is an outcome of the consensus reached and firmly established in literature—although laboriously attained, constantly at risk and repeatedly violated—which has nonetheless created over the centuries the stuff of what we call 'civilisation'. Our antipathy to this outmoded word may serve to make us realise how threatened is the continued existence of what it stands for. And yet this word, unlike political and scientific terms, has its admirers, emits an aura, as do other words which occur to me randomly such as: 'peace', 'moon', 'city', 'meadow', 'life', 'death'. Do we really want to give them all up? Do we seriously mean to replace them with the concepts: 'nuclear stalemate', 'earth satellite', 'settled conurbation', 'fertile area', 'kinetic form of matter' and 'expiry'?

The natural scientists have managed with the help of scientific jargon to protect their inventions from their own feelings; apparently logical linguistic constructions support the politicians' *idée fixe* that the salvation of humanity lies in the possibility of its multiple destruction.

Literature today must be peace research.

Writing hasn't been made any easier by the knowledge that our two countries, once called 'Germany', a name they forfeited when they corrupted it with Auschwitz—that the land on both sides of the **Elbe** would be amongst the first to be blotted out in the event of a 'nuclear conflict'. There are sure to be geographical maps already drawn up which have charted the stages of this obliteration. Cassandra, it seems to me, must have loved Troy more than she loved herself when she dared prophesy the downfall of their city to her fellow citizens.³⁴ Have these two countries perhaps been insufficiently loved by their inhabitants, I ask myself, and hence display a tendency—like a person who has not been loved and hence is unable to love—to destroy themselves and others? I ask this in order to be able to strongly contradict myself and, absurd as it may seem, as proof of the contrary I take literature itself. It would not be enough, I know, for a people to possess a homeland only in their literature. And yet, I suggest—in the present situation any suggestion, even the most eccentric one, should be granted—literature should be permitted to confront that map of death with its own map'. Every place and landscape, everything about human relationships which literature has described minutely, exactly and partisanly, painfully, critically, devotedly, fearfully and joyfully, ironically, rebelliously and lovingly, should be erased from this map of death and count as saved. It's about time literature written by Germans was not ineffectual; the efforts and

achievements of literature in both German states over the last three decades in grieving and rejoicing, this literature's confrontation with the 'truth of the here and now' ought to count for once, to the benefit of both countries. After such a long time literature should be consulted and taken at its word for once, just this once, in order to help safeguard the survival of life on earth.

She's stark raving mad, you say. Fine. So I lack—to use the language of psychiatry—insight into my illness, and I'm succumbing to this sheer madness to avoid falling prey to the darker side of reason. It is conceivable that a military command really would find it harder to mark out for destruction a city described in precise and intimate detail than one which no-one knows very well, or one which affected no-one so deeply that they had felt compelled to describe it as the place they grew up, the place where they had been humiliated or first fallen in love.

Now you are smiling at my naivete. At my irrationality: *He seemed perfectly rational, spoke with people*, Biichner said of Lenz. *He behaved just like the others; yet there was a terrible emptiness in him, he no longer felt fear or desire, his existence was to him a burden to be endured.*³⁵ In that land beyond belief too, there of all places, people will talk, albeit softly. A conversation about trees, about water earth sky man—in an attempt which seems to me more realistic than the strictly crazy speculation about the end of the world. After exhaustive exploration of the truth expressed by the phrase 'out of joint', other words would be sure to pop up which we would wish to use cautiously and not in a loud-mouthed manner. Because we would know: none of them, not even the most honest, would be the last word. We would hope that none of them would be the *last*.

This skin too will be peeled off and torn to shreds.³⁶

NOTES

1. 'Taboo of taboos'. This is a quotation from the speech which follows and refers to two characters from a comedy by Biichner entitled *Leonce and Lena* (transl. by Victor Price, Oxford, O.U.P., 1971). In the speech, Christa Wolf uses 'Leonce by his many names' and 'Rosetta by her many names' as generic names for men and women both in literature, life, and history.
2. *Selbstversuch—Self Experiment—Wolf (1972)—see* attached bibliography for works by Wolf available in English. This story was originally commissioned for a volume entitled *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* (A Bolt from the Blue) in which an equal number of men and women writers contributed a story around the theme of how it would feel to wake up one fine morning and find oneself transformed into the opposite sex. Ed. by Edith Anderson, Rostock, Hinstorff Verlag, 1975.
3. Maxie Wander, *Guten Morgen, Du Schone* (Berlin, Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1977). Christa Wolf's interpretative essay on this volume, entitled 'Berührung', first appeared in the GDR literary journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, No. 2, 1978, pp. 53-62. In the West German edition of Wander's work which followed, Wolf's essay was included as an introduction.

The German Democratic Republic is one of the few countries in the world to have instituted almost all the material preconditions for women's emancipation. Women are legally guaranteed equal educational opportunity and equal pay for equal work. Since 86 per cent of them work in social production, they enjoy economic independence from men. There are also several schemes for women to improve their qualifications whilst on the job, to raise their level of skills and hence income in relation to men's. Women have entered many formerly male-dominated sectors of the economy, (although the converse is not true). Child-care facilities including after-school clubs are provided by the state for all children over three and for about 65 per cent of those under three. Contraception and abortion are freely available on the women's decision alone, to all women over sixteen regardless of marital status, and paid maternity leave is extremely generous (six months for the first, one year for the second and subsequent children). With such reproductive control, maternity leave provisions and childcare facilities, women in the GDR enjoy an area of real choice and autonomy over their lives—whether and when to have children, whether and when to return to work after having them—which is available only to the privileged few in the West. This is not to say that these necessary preconditions are sufficient conditions for the full liberation of women, as indeed is manifest in the Wander volume, in which women of varying ages, family and professional status speak frankly of their aspirations and disappointments in the personal, work and political arenas. The contradictions faced by women in their daily life are also the subject of stories appearing in the GDR in the last few years written by a younger generation of women writers, who see themselves (as one of them, Helga Schubert said) as no longer hampered by Wolf's difficulty in saying 'I'.

5. Wolf, 'Berührung' (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 62.
6. The references here are to plays by Georg Buchner to which Wolf refers in the text of the speech and which are detailed in the biographical information on Buchner given below.
- Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben (The Reader and the Writer, 1971/1977)*. See bio/bibliographical details below.
8. Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, 1982, Eng. ed. p. 23.
9. Wolf, Biichner prize speech, see below (p. 178).
10. See Buchner, Danton in *Danton's Death* (Price ed.) Act I, Sc. V, p. 20. See below for bibliographical details of Buchner's plays available in English.
11. Buchner, Letter to his fiancée Minna Jaeglé, Spring 1834, in Werner R. Lehmann's edition of Buchner's complete works in 4 vols., Hamburger Ausgabe, Wegner Verlag, 1967, Vol. 2, p. 426.
12. Buchner, *Lenz* (Harrap's German Classics, p. 39, or: Mermaid, pp. 143, 144).
13. The 'magic broom' refers to a ballad by Goethe, entitled *Der Zauberlehrling (The Sorcerer's Apprentice)*, which was set to music by Paul Dukas.
14. Johann Wolfgang van Goethe, *Faust*, Part II, Act V, pp. 326, 327. (Vol. 3, Goethe's Works in 4 vols., Frankfurt a.M., Insel-Verlag, 1965.)
15. Wolf is alluding here to Robert Oppenheimer, 'father of the atom bomb', and to the book about him and other nuclear scientists involved in the development of the atom bomb, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns* by Robert Jungk (1958, first appeared 1956 in German). Robert Jungk has written several further books dealing with the implications for humanity of this discovery (amongst them *Children of the Ashes—1961*, about the survivors of Hiroshima, *The Everyman Project: Resources for a Humane Future—1973*, *The Nuclear State—1978*) and is an active campaigner for peace. He was a speaker at the October 1981 mass peace demonstration in Bonn and was present at the Congress for European

Nuclear Disarmament (END) held in Brussels in July 1982. He also participated in the Writers' Congresses on questions of peace held in Berlin, GDR in December 1981 and in the Hague in May 1982, as did Wolf herself. The sacred Indian epic poem Jungk quotes Oppenheimer as reciting in the face of the first atomic explosion is the *Bhagavad Gita*—see Jungk, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1958, p. 201.

16. The word 'overkill' appears in English in the original German text.
17. Goethe, 'Das Gottliche' ('The Divine'), in Goethe, *Werke*, Vol. I: *Gedichte (Poems)*, Frankfurt a.M., Insel-Verlag, 1965, pp. 85, 86.
18. Buchner, *Danton's Death*, *op. cit.*, spoken by Danton to Camille, Act II, Sc. I, p. 28.
19. This appears as one word in the original German: 'verkehrt'.
20. Buchner, *Leonce and Lena*, (Price ed.), Act I, Sc. III, pp. 81, 82.
21. Buchner, *Danton's Death*, *op. cit.*, Act III, Sc. IX, p. 58.
22. Rosetta and Lena are the main female figures in Buchner's play *Leonce and Lena*, Marie the female lead in *Woyzeck* and Marion, Julie, Lucile the female characters in *Danton's Death*. All of these characters are no more than foils to or appendages of the male protagonists as Wolf's speech both exemplifies and generalises for women's role in history.
23. Buchner, *Leonce and Lena*, *op. cit.*, Act I, Sc. IV, p. 88.
24. Leonce says: 'The world is. . . a hall of mirrors, so narrow I hardly dare stretch my arms for fear of smashing them. . . I'd be left standing in front of the bare naked walls.' Buchner, *Leonce and Lena*, *op. cit.*, Act II, Sc. I, p.
25. Leonce, in *ibid.*, Act. I, Sc. I, p. 75. In a similar vein, Lenz regrets being unable to walk on his head. (Buchner, *Lenz*, *op. cit.*, p. 37).
26. Buchner, *Danton's Death*, *op. cit.*, Act IV, Sc. VIII, p. 70.
27. An allusion to Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.
28. An allusion to Ibsen's play *The Doll's House*.
29. Marlene Dietrich in one of her songs.
30. Rosetta in Buchner's play *Leonce and Lena*, *op. cit.*, Act I, Sc. III, p. 80.
31. In Buchner's *Danton's Death* (*op. cit.*, Act II, Sc. II, p. 33) a citizen remarks: 'The earth is a thin crust. I always think I might fall through where there's a hole like that. . . You've got to step warily, it might break under you.'
32. Leonce to Lena, Buchner, *Leonce and Lena*, *op. cit.*, Act II, Sc. IV, p. 95.
33. Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Keine Delikatessen', in Bachmann, *Werke (Collected Works)*, Munich, Piper & Co., 1978, Vol. I, pp. 172, 173.
34. Christa Wolf gave five lectures in Frankfurt, West Germany in May 1982 on the **Cassandra** theme, entitled 'The Genesis of a Story' (culminating in a Cassandra story).
35. Buchner, *Lenz*, Harrap, p. 61, or Mermaid, p. 166.
36. Alludes to Buchner's *Leonce and Lena*, *op. cit.*, Act III, Sc. III, p. 100, where Valerio, court jester, ponders while taking off a series of masks: 'Am I this? Or this? Or this? I'm getting frightened; I shall peel myself away to nothing.' This closing sentiment reiterates the theme raised at the beginning of Wolf's speech with the allusion to roles played as against true identity in *Danton's Death*, referenced above in note 10. The concept raised by Buchner and Wolf of the face becoming the mask, the person becoming the role, the face coming away with the mask or the mask sticking to the face is graphically illustrated by the mime Marcel Marceau in his 'Mask Builder'.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Christa Wolf (1929-)

Born in **1929** in Landsberg, **Wartha** (now **Gorzów Wielkopolski** in Poland), Christa Wolf studied German literature at Jena and **Leipzig** universities from **1949-1953**. Between **1953** and **1962** she worked variously as research assistant to the Writers' Union of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), reader, journalist, literary critic and editor for the literary journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur* and for the Mitteldeutscher Verlag, one of the largest publishing houses in the GDR. Since **1962** she has been a freelance writer.

Wolf's main works are the novels *Der geteilte Himmel (Divided Heavens)*, **1963**, *Nachdenken über Christa T. (The Quest for Christa T.)*, **1968**, *Kindheitsmuster (Imprint of Childhood)* **1976** and the story *Kein Ort. Nirgends (No Place, Nowhere)* **1979**. In addition, she has written numerous film scripts, stories and essays. Some of the latter appeared in the important collection *Lesen und Schreiben (The Reader and the Writer)* **1971**, and three of what Wolf calls in a subtitle 'improbable' stories, including 'Selbstversuch' ('Experiment in Identity') were published under the title *Unter den Linden* (a street name in Berlin) **1974**.

Prior to winning the **Georg Büchner** prize for literature in **1980**, Christa Wolf had been awarded the **Heinrich Mann** prize in **1963**, the National Prize of the GDR for Art and Literature in **1964** and the Bremen literature prize in **1978**. Christa Wolf has participated in both the recent Writers' Congresses concerned with questions of peace—the first between writers from the GDR and West Germany, held in December **1981** in Berlin; the second a wider European gathering which took place in the Hague in May **1982**.

Christa Wolf's portrayal of the relationship of the individual to society has always been dominated by the exploration of subjectivity and the possibilities for the full development of individual human potential within a humane socialist society. She sees the writer's task as reflecting these deliberations transparently to aid the understanding and personal growth of present and future generations, a process she **calls** in her motto for *Christa T.* (in a quotation from Johannes R. Becher, Expressionist and GDR poet and man of letters) 'Dieses Zu-sich-selber-Kommen' ('This coming-to-oneself').

Christa Wolf's writing is also deeply influenced by her experience of a

childhood under fascism, an experience she attempts to confront and come to terms with *Christa T.* and especially *Kindheitsmuster*. In her writing she refers to her generation as being deeply marked by the violent break between this influence on their formative years and the idealistic aspirations and partial disillusionment of their commitment as young adults to socialism. It is the split between these two 'eras' in her life which leads Christa Wolf to speak in *Christa T.* (a theme echoed in the narrative structure of *Kindheitsmuster*) of the 'Schwierigkeit, "ich" zu sagen' ('The difficulty of saying "I"').

Georg Buchner (1813–1837)

Born in 1813 near Darmstadt, Buchner studied science and medicine at the universities of Strasbourg and Giessen. Fired by the ideals of the French Revolution, Buchner became involved in political struggle, forming an illegal revolutionary organisation called 'Society for the Rights of Man'. In 1834 he wrote *Der hessische Landbote (The Hesse Country Messenger)*, a flaming denunciation of the poverty and miserable feudal living conditions of the peasants in his home state, the Grand Duchy of Hesse. He combines his attack on the rich for their exploitation of the peasants with an incitement to the peasants to rise up in revolt.

Buchner was forced to flee the resulting police search in 1835, first to Strasbourg, then to Zurich, where he completed his doctorate at the university and began work as a lecturer. In 1837 he died suddenly at the age of 23 of typhoid fever.

In 1835 Buchner wrote his first play, *Danton's Tod (Danton's Death)* which deals with the tragic failure of the French Revolution, the internal struggles, Danton's ultimately fatalistic pessimism and the real conditions of the poverty-stricken masses, for whom neither Danton and Camille, nor the Jacobins under Robespierre and St. Just provide bread. *Lenz*, also written in 1835, is a novella about the 18th century poet of that name. It suggests the style and themes of Expressionism in Lenz's despairing emptiness, his chaotic visions of nature gone wild and his failure to maintain a grip on everyday reality. With *Woyzeck*, the drama fragment of 1835/136, Buchner returns to the attack on social injustice of his first work. Based on a documentary case of a poor army barber who was hung for killing his wife, *Woyzeck* illustrates the origins of such events in the social circumstances of poverty and exploitation. Finally in 1836, Buchner wrote his satirical comedy *Leonce and Lena*, which in its parody on the boredom and emptiness of court life and its comic portrayal of meaninglessness prefigures the theatre of the absurd.

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