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BARBARA RUGEN

Woyzeck: A New Approach

Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* has been encrusted with a conventional interpretation that is illuminating but inclines toward sentimentality and impedes our grasping basic qualities of the play. While emphasizing the cause of Woyzeck’s victimization, the conventional approach overlooks the psychological price that Woyzeck himself pays for being victimized, dwelling on the fact of his suffering, but neglecting how he deals with his agony and despair. Such an approach invites a certain glibness. As a “second species,” a half-starved human guinea pig, Woyzeck lives through a kind of Auschwitz; yet who would describe the inmates of Auschwitz as brutalized children, the image Richard Gilman has applied to Woyzeck and his fellow victims? Who would summarize the behavior of those inmates struggling to survive as natural in their spontaneity and vitality, as giving themselves anew, and reaching the apotheosis of love, as conventionalists summarize the dominant modes of behavior of Büchner’s protagonists? For the freeing of *Woyzeck* from its traditional interpretation, it is necessary to approach the play from a radically different point of view, as Jerzy Grotowski did when he confronted *Akropolis* from the perspective of Auschwitz. Only in this way is it possible to come to grips with essential elements in this classic and restore its power for contemporary audiences.

Seven representative examples of the conventional approach are Herbert Lindenberger’s essay in his *Georg Büchner* (Carbondale, 1964), Richard Schechner’s introductory essay to the Lehmann reconstruction of *Woyzeck* (1969), Henry Schmidt’s analysis included in the same volume, and the four studies of the play in the 1972 *Yale/Theatre* issue on Büchner written by Richard Gilman, Robert Brustein, Timothy Wiles, and Tom Haas. Besides ranking among the most recent and distinguished contributions to *Woyzeck* criticism, these essays are based upon different versions of *Woyzeck*—an important point if we are to clarify from the start whether I am indeed offering a new approach to Büchner’s drama, or whether the real issue is

*Barbara Ragen lectures on drama in the Department of English at the University of Haifa, Israel.*

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one of different versions of the play which lend themselves to a particular approach. For Woyzeck consists of four partial sketches—three drafts and an incomplete final revision—and while editors of Woyzeck reconstructions have given precedence to the final revision, they have also turned to the three drafts to resolve the gaps in the final plan: to Draft One for the Grandmother’s tale and for the murder of Marie and its aftermath; to Draft Two for Woyzeck’s street encounter with the Captain and the basic outline of his character, in particular his philosophical reflections; and to Draft Three for the episode with the medical students and the scene where Woyzeck is rejected by his son. If editors confined themselves to the revision they would remain with half a play, but the question is whether their manipulation of the sketches into a stageable drama has influenced interpretations of Büchner’s play.3

Certainly Brustein and Gilman have been influenced by their reliance on the standard Bergemann reconstruction, a version which has fostered common misconceptions about Woyzeck. Gilman, for example, assumes that from fairly brutal first sketches, Büchner developed the character of Woyzeck and Marie with greater depth and sympathy in a nearly completed final revision and that, accordingly, he is respecting Büchner’s final intentions when he stresses the sympathetic side of their behavior. Conceiving of Woyzeck as “the downtrodden, voice-haunted humanist, the philosopher malgré-lui” (Gilman, p. 31), Gilman cites as his evidence Woyzeck’s anguish and philosophical reflections, completely unaware that most of these lines are taken from an early sketch which Bergemann has drastically manipulated. In this sketch (Draft Two) the philosophical dimension of Woyzeck’s character is coincident with brutal behavior which Bergemann has wholly ignored in his efforts to convey a sympathetic portrait of Büchner’s hero. As Carl Mueller writes, the Woyzeck of Bergemann’s major critical edition is not the same person, certainly not the full person, in keeping with Büchner’s whole range of thought.4 Small wonder, then, that Gilman undervalues the brutalizing effects on Woyzeck and Marie of a lifetime of dehumanization and inclines toward a one-sided view of their behavior.

But do we find significantly different interpretations from Lindenberger, who is consulting both the Bergemann version and the unaltered sketches, or among the critics who, like myself, are using the Lehmann reconstruction and the original plans?5 Clearly Lindenberger is not misled by misconceptions about Büchner’s text. Clearly Schechner, Schmidt, and Wiles have in Lehmann’s reconstruction and analysis of the sketches new components to particularize their Woyzeck research. All four scholars have turned from editorial interpretations to resolve for themselves the


3 I am using the Lehmann reconstruction of 1967, although in recent years Lehmann has come under increasing attack for taking undue liberties with the text. But no Woyzeck interpretation should stand or fall on a reconstruction, and the value of Lehmann’s version is that it includes both the unaltered manuscripts and an admittedly unauthentic reconstruction that aims at providing a readable and actable whole. The reader always has the opportunity to weigh Lehmann’s editorial suggestions against the original sources.
gaps in the revision. And even so, they view Woyzeck in essentially the same terms that Gilman, Brustein, and Haas have done, for the simple reason that they are taking the same approach that those three scholars have taken. They too stress the cause rather than the effects of Woyzeck’s victimization, and they too are more concerned with the nature of his suffering than the means by which he tries to survive his chaos and despair. The real issue here, then, is not the problem of different reconstructions or the problem of textual discoveries that disprove traditional misconceptions. If these seven recent and distinguished essays all reveal a fundamentally similar point of view from which I depart on the basis of my own examination of the Lehmann reconstruction and the unaltered drafts, it is because at issue here is, above all, the matter of a new approach to Woyzeck.

The arguments in all seven essays revolve primarily around identifying the forces which victimize Woyzeck. Gilman, Brustein, and Lindenberger argue that the play operates on an existential level, for “what is on display here,” writes Gilman, “is a world from which values do not rise, denouements do not cure, personal fate does not teach others” (Gilman, p. 29). No moral is to be drawn, adds Brustein, only the recognition that “society is merely another form of Nature, and in the state of Nature, man is simply another of the beasts;” Woyzeck is “at the mercy of a cold, unfeeling world in which God is dead and man is slowly dying of a lingering disease” (Brustein, pp. 6, 5); or as Lindenberger puts it, “the oppression and callousness of which Woyzeck is a victim . . . themselves shown as products of a sick and precarious world” (Lindenberger, p. 107). But Tom Haas concentrates on the psychological aspects he discovered when he directed Woyzeck at Yale and sees the play as “a hallucinatory nightmare,” the terror of a concentration camp where “trapped people” behave like caged rats, “passionate, feverish, determined to stamp out this blight, this running sore, this Woyzeck” (Haas, p. 91). Wiles takes an economic point of view, while Schechner and Schmidt incline toward a social interpretation. As Schechner writes, “Woyzeck is denied full humanity by the captain and the doctor. The struggle in Woyzeck is not simply between classes, but between species. It is an absolute struggle, signaled by the absolute gap between Woyzeck and those above him” (Schechner, p. 16).

But here the differences end. Although there is a wide disagreement about which forces victimize Woyzeck, still the informing premise of these seven interpretations remains uniformly the same. “The play lives by using Woyzeck” (Haas, p. 92), or in other words, Woyzeck represents the condition “of being acted upon, of being used” (Gilman, p. 29), or, Woyzeck is the “object rather than the subject of the drama” (Schechner, p. 11); “in the character of Woyzeck,” writes Lindenberger, “Büchner would seem to have carried the idea of a passive hero about as far as it can possibly go” (Lindenberger, p. 107). The drawback, however, of approaching Büchner’s protagonist from the perspective of being “acted upon” is the tendency to select from his personality only those traits which establish him as being “the archetypal victim” (Brustein, p. 5). One finds, for example, that any specific trait assigned to Woyzeck must be reconciled with the basic assumption that he is “helpless,” “passive,” and “suffering,” three adjectives used so insistently and repeatedly in most of these essays as to convey the impression that they fairly well summarize all there is to be said about Woyzeck; for example, Woyzeck is a “passive sufferer” (Gilman, p. 28),
Woyzeck “suffers like an animal” lacking “the vocabulary to give his suffering expression” until “his pent-up suffering breaks loose” (Schmidt, “Notes,” p. 106–7). Woyzeck is a “suffering” character embodying “suffering mankind” (Brustein, p. 5). Suffering, yes—but does “suffering” indeed summarize Woyzeck’s experience?

Perhaps inevitable, the result of viewing the play in terms of an anguished victim at the mercy of some “great antagonist” (Schmidt, “Notes,” p. 109), is the tendency to reduce the dynamics of the entire drama to a level of melodramatic contrasts and to sentimentalize the differences between the passively enduring Woyzeck and a world “intent on maiming, baiting, cutting off, destroying” him (Haas, p. 91). Richness, complexity, ambiguity give way to this sort of contrast: “in comparison with his tormentors’ Woyzeck is “humanity itself” (Brustein, p. 6), or this: “the apotheosis of love” which Woyzeck achieves “elevates him above his oppressors” (Schmidt, “Notes,” p. 95), or this: in contrast with “the great conspiracy of silence and pretense, rationalization and vainglory” which the other characters uphold, “Woyzeck stands before us as a child . . . terrified, disconsolate, astounded by the treachery and cruelty of the world” (Gilman, p. 34). Obviously Woyzeck is victimized and certainly he suffers, but if each approach to a play yields its own discoveries, then this perspective on Woyzeck has yielded only one side of the story, inclining toward sentimentality. Indeed, Schechner himself has sensed this: “We cannot look straight across into Woyzeck’s eyes,” writes Schechner: “we can see in him only an object of our contempt, our pity, our sentimentality, or our horror” (Schechner, pp. 12–13).

Instead of emphasizing victimization and suffering, let us investigate in Woyzeck the question of how people survive victimization: take as starting points the cruelty and feelings of chaos that infect that whole society in the play and proceed from there to explore the mental, emotional, and physical patterns of survival under such circumstances. One possible guideline for approaching the play in this way would be Peter Brook’s 1976 production of The Ik, a documentary drama based on Colin Turnbull’s anthropological study of a dehumanized mountain tribe. Beyond the similarity in situation, the same problem presented itself to Brook which arises with Woyzeck, for even anthropologist Turnbull, author of The Mountain People, could not look straight across into the victims’ eyes but, aghast at what he saw, portrayed their desperate endgame with sentimentality, horror, and ultimately with contempt. It took a person of Brook’s theatrical genius to realize that the events of an extreme situation speak best for themselves, and to enable his actors to come to grips with the Ik predicament by bearing witness instead of acting the Ik suffering; by discovering the Ik patterns of survival rather than judging the mountain hell; and, instead of drawing moral contrasts, by tracing an ongoing process where the strong brutalize the weak, who in turn brutalize the weaker among themselves. The Ik provides, above all, an idea of a methodology for exploring Woyzeck in a new way. Although it by no means constitutes the total explanation for Büchner’s play, one can at least say this: if we follow Brook’s type of approach we will discover dimensions to Büchner’s drama that will make it impossible to perform this classic in the same way again.

Just as Woyzeck is set against a background of victimization, so The Ik shows the
plight of a tribe of Ugandan hunters and gatherers who have been almost completely annihilated. In 1946 the Ugandan government turned part of the Ik territory into a game reserve and, in the interests of preserving wildlife, forbade them to hunt or gather wild fruit. A tribe of hunters was supposed to become, overnight, a tribe of farmers in a mountainous region that averages four inches of rainfall a year. It takes centuries for a people to evolve into agriculture. The Ik starved.

The Ugandan government had not intended to decimate the Ik, and the society that destroys Woyzeck is also not deliberately cruel. Schechner’s observation—‘the struggle in Woyzeck is not simply between classes, but between species’—comes to mind for, in each case, the humanity of the victims is not perceived. Civilized Ugandans saw a tribe that was still climbing trees, and Woyzeck is denied the reasoning powers attributed to the monkey in the freak show; the combined efforts of the missionaries had not swayed the Ik to Christian morality, and Woyzeck, the product of twenty generations of Christian humanizing efforts, has no morality either.

It is not cruelty to abuse a “subspecies” for higher purposes. The Ik were left to starve in the interests of wildlife, and Woyzeck lives on peas in the name of science. A diet of peas can kill, but as in the decimation of the Ik, justifications are offered: just as there was an outside chance the Ik would evolve into farmers overnight, so Woyzeck gets paid for subsisting on peas—two cents a day.

Anthropologist Turnbull felt both pity and disgust that the Ik had to forego human values to survive, and that same horror, observes Richard Gilman, permeates Woyzeck: “What gives Woyzeck so much of its vertiginous horror is the way it exhibits the disintegration of the very notion of human existence as something unique and valuable and something in turn sustained by values” (Gilman, p. 33). We have seen the conventional approach to Woyzeck. Gilman is an example of those who, proceeding from this point of view, ask how Woyzeck feels to live without human values or a value placed on human existence, and the answer is a foregone conclusion: “terrified, disconsolate, astounded by the treachery and cruelty of the world.” No other significantly different answer would make sense. Both the question and the answer are perfectly valid—Woyzeck is indeed stricken by the treachery and cruelty of his world—but the actors from Brook’s International Centre of Theatre Research* asked different questions and reached entirely different answers that are also worth consideration. “How do the Ik cope with the fact of having to dispense with human values?”—this was their line of questioning, for in order to bear witness to the Ik predicament, the Brook group sought to discover the basic, shared patterns of behavior which the Ik have evolved in their struggle for survival.

This is a valid approach to bring to Woyzeck and leads to similar discoveries. Woyzeck and Marie may stand apart from their society in their painful sentence, but they have spent their entire lives coping in a brutalizing society that treats the hu-

* The Ik was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Roundhouse Theatre in London, where it opened in January 1976. Andreas Katselas played Turnbull: the five actors representing the Ik were Malick Bagayogo, Michele Collison, Miriam Goldschmidt, Bruce Myers, and Katsuhiro Oida.
man being as so much “dust, sand, and dirt.”? Following Brook’s example, we will probe beneath the contrast between suffering victims and ruthless tormentors to a level of patterns shared by an entire dehumanized society and find the same common ground of clinging to certainties and taking care of ‘number one’ that is evident in The Ik. We will inquire, as did Brook’s actors, whether the issue is one of villains and victims or whether it is a situation of men and women resisting brutalizing circumstances with actions that are themselves necessarily cruel. We will see that any terror or astonishment at the cruelty of the world is subsumed in a general tendency toward self-punishment.

It was by pursuing this line of investigation that the actors arrived at the fundamental Ik pattern of survival. In the production, which recreates Turnbull’s 1964 visit to the tribe after they have been in their predicament for almost twenty years, Turnbull asks the Ik why they do not go to the Sudan. A few Ik have already gone, he points out, and since the tribe are nomads, they have only to pick up and move on—make a couple days’ journey—to get out of their plight and into a land where they could hunt again. But the answer to why they do not leave is always “Because we live here.” A woman finally makes the journey, but a few weeks later she returns to the desolation she has always known. Turnbull ultimately advises the authorities to capture the Ik and forcibly distribute them in small groups among other tribes. The experiment is tried, but the Ik wander back to their traditional hunting grounds and the deprivation they know.

What Turnbull does not perceive—but we, the audience, are made to understand—is that when the Ik explain their living in a wasteland with “Because we live here,” they are not simply talking in circles. They are gripping onto certainties. Their homeland is a certainty where the tribe have evolved over a generation of time a set of elemental customs and traditions. They starve, they live without values, but it is the way of life they know, and if Turnbull ascribes to them a bestial identity, we see that in fact they are recovering from losing their identity along with everything else. Within twenty years the Ik have evolved a network of habits, routines, feelings, and attitudes to fit their new circumstances, some traditions being revised from memories of how things once were—they still make seasonal hunting migrations although they know there is no longer any game—other customs deriving from newer realities that do not accommodate relics from the past. The word for goodness, for example, has come to mean the individual possession of food, and, although the tradition of funeral feasts is retained, now the dying remain in the village only if all the children agree to nurse and feed them. We realize that leaving the desolate homeland would mean abandoning such certainties to face new uncertainties. When the Ik are taken away by force, it is established as inevitable that they will return.

Rather than stress Woyzeck’s suffering and helplessness and take for granted his passivity, let us take this approach and ask how Woyzeck copes with his situation. In a more sophisticated handling of the problem, Büchner shows that nothing is lost on Woyzeck. If starvation makes him dizzy, his groping to understand what he can-

7 Büchner (Lehmann reconstruction) p. 32. All quotations from the Lehmann reconstruction are hereafter cited in the text. Quotations from the unaltered manuscripts are indicated as such in the footnotes, with page numbers to the Lehmann edition.
not understand leaves him anxious, panicked: "Is no to blame for yes, or yes for no? I'll have to think about that. (Goes off with long strides, first slowly, then ever faster.)" (p. 41). Yet, like the Ik, Woyzeck has been stripped of a sense of self and orientation. If Woyzeck is so overwhelmed by society's cruelty that he sees and hears things, still this same tormented victim is also a bigot who has absorbed the currents of hostility against the Freemasons, an underground movement interpreted by him as being people who move in a hollow space under the ground. With the sentimental Captain he explains that his class is too poor to be moral, yet with his guilt-ridden wife he thunders self-righteously about the wages of sin. In the presence of the learned Doctor he philosophizes, but among his own kind he says that he cleaned his right elbow with his right hand, and expects them to believe him. Whatever people vomit into him, Woyzeck vomits a little back.

"Every man's a chasm. You get dizzy when you look down into it." Woyzeck is even more menaced by chaos than the Ik, and like them, he too copes by immersing himself in the certainties of the roles, rules, and routines available to him—the very patterns that have debilitated him all along. Woyzeck is often played as "running around like an open razor blade" (p. 40). The point is that he is struggling not to surrender to the chaos that engulfs him, not to run around like an open razor blade, not to explode. Woyzeck shaving the Captain is a scene of high suspense, as this half-crazed man holds the razor to his Captain's neck very mechanically, very respectfully; amid his usual semblance of meekness and obedience, he might suddenly explode into murderous violence. The people who are least in command of themselves are usually among those who are the most dutiful and methodical, who must have quiet and everything in its place. Woyzeck and all the rest of the explosive society Büchner has depicted should be performed in the rich interplay between feeling like cold-blooded spiders racing along a dissolving spiderweb, and moving slowly and quietly through an ordered life of roles, rules, and routines.

Dehumanized by their grotesque fixed ideas, the Doctor and Captain are clearly immersed in routinization—the Captain warns Woyzeck, "One thing at a time. You're making me dizzy" (p. 34)—but so also is Woyzeck, who has this to hold onto:

**DOCTOR.** You're doing everything as usual? Shaving the Captain?
**WOYZECK.** Yes, sir.
**DOCTOR.** Eating your peas?
**WOYZECK.** Same as ever, Doctor. My wife gets the money for the household.
**DOCTOR.** Going on duty?
**WOYZECK.** Yes, sir.

[p. 39]

He reveals this same behavior in his personal life as well, a fact challenging the assumption that his absorption in routines is simply a matter of professional duties. Suspicious of Marie, Woyzeck immediately diverts his thoughts to routines: it is time for the boy to go to bed and for Woyzeck himself to return to work. Overwhelmed by proof of Marie's infidelity, he reaches out for another kind of order and

* Büchner, first draft, part two, scene eight, p. 77.
orientation—the tangible possessions he has stored in a trunk, that tell him who he is. He sorts them out: a jacket that brings no associations is disposed of, family mementoes and religious souvenirs are scrutinized, an identity card fascinates him because it has arranged his life in orderly sets of names and numbers. When Woyzeck and Marie walk into the woods they both know that her death is inevitable, and they deal with their mounting desperation like the Jews who paused before entering the gas chamber to ask what time it was, or do something equally habitual. Terrified, Woyzeck and Marie cling to the stability of schedules. “We have to go. It's time,” he tells her, and copes with the imminent murder by translating their relationship into a temporal affair that it is time to terminate:

WOYZECK. Do you know how long it's been, Marie?
MARIE. Two years since Pentecost.
WOYZECK. Do you know how long it's going to be?

Marie assuages her terror in the face of death with the sure knowledge that “I have to get back”; “I've got to make supper” (pp. 51-2).

As Turnbull wrote in The Mountain People, the Ilk even consider their norms to be good, inasmuch as they are organized around the process, if not the purpose, of survival. Because “goodness,” marangik, has come to mean the individual possession of food, if you “attempt to discover what their concept is of a 'good man,' iakw anamarang, hoping that the answer will be that a good man is a man who helps you fill your own stomach, you get the truly Icien answer: a good man is the one who has a full stomach.”

Brook's actors responded by examining their own use of the word “goodness,” not just as a moral concept—on that basis they could only condemn the Ilk—but also as a word associated with pleasure, gratification, and survival. When a thirsty person drinks water, for example, he is likely to say, “that’s good.”

Instead of concentrating on what makes Woyzeck suffer, let us take this approach and find out what seems good to Woyzeck, from the standpoint of survival. Uniquely, Woyzeck asks questions about his existence: he asks why, and encounters silence as if the world were dead; he asks where, and feels hollow ground swirling beneath his feet; he asks who, and finds a bottomless abyss. Woyzeck's work routines are not moral, but in his eyes they are good. Regimentation can bring order into chaos and be a godsend. Feeling fires shooting up inside and around him, Woyzeck finds relief and solace at having his life fixed into immutable schedules in which each day fits into place and one thing follows another as regular as clockwork. To a person who runs around like an open razor blade it feels good to be slowed down, disciplined, regulated into “doing everything as usual,” the “same as ever.”

Woyzeck may well be “the archetypal victim at the mercy of a cold, unfeeling world,” but let us examine the draining emotional toll on this victim of a lifetime of abiding by his society's brutalizing norms, and enlarge our perspective to perceive

Woyzeck in relation to an ongoing social process where the strong brutalize the weak, who in turn abuse each other. Marie's personal history offers a distinctive example of this process. As a member of the lower class, Marie's father was probably as dehumanized as Woyzeck is; he in turn reduced Marie to the role of whore and tried to have an affair with her when she was ten years old. Now Marie is a guilt-ridden, self-hating woman who cannot stand a man's touch; not her father's—"When I was ten years old, my father didn't dare touch me when I looked at him"—not Woyzeck's—"Don't you dare touch me, Franz! I'd rather have a knife in my body than your hand on mine"—16—and not the Drum Major's—"(Violently.) Just try to touch me!" (p. 36).

Woyzeck reaches out to Marie for human contact, yet after all the brutalization they have endured, Marie cannot bear the weight of his desperation any more than he has the strength to sustain her crippling needs. Both seek love and acceptance, but both reduce the feverish humanity of the other to stable and static images. When someone is groping to find his way out of an enveloping fog, he does not consider the nature and worth of a landmark, he needs to know its location in relation to where he himself is standing. Woyzeck seems to have fixed his marital relationship into the static roles of himself as chastiser and Marie as whore long before he has proof of her infidelity. For as oblivious as he is to her behavior in ordinary circumstances—at the sideshow, he is impervious to the conspicuous exertions of Marie to climb into the first row (a sergeant has to help her)—he instantly detects such small suspicious items as the new earrings she is wearing. The contradiction suggests that he anticipates signs of her unfaithfulness. Indeed, elsewhere the mere fact of Marie conversing with a man on a public street is enough to convince Woyzeck of her adultery. "I saw him," he cries, without even mentioning her, as if her adultery is the given and the real issue is to catch her with a lover. And Marie does not even ask who or what he saw, or show surprise, but answers with a weary retort as if she is getting used to such confrontations: "As the day is long and the world is old, lots of people can stand on one spot, one after another" (p. 37).

Love is subsumed in the search for mental stability. Marie counts on Woyzeck for the one kind of security he can provide, financial support, being as unable to give of herself as he is unable to break through his own self-protective shell. One day Woyzeck puts in a full day's work wearing himself out chopping wood, after which he cannot take a break but has to run off to roll call, and aware of this, Marie wonders what is wrong with him: "What's the matter with you, Franz? You look so upset."11 As far as she has bothered to think it through, Woyzeck's thoughts are making him crazy; "He'll go crazy with those thoughts of his" (p. 29). As to the fact that he is being destroyed—that he is enervated by those crazy thoughts of his, weakened by subsisting on peas—not a word of sympathy or concern comes from her.

How do these dehumanized and desperate human beings relate to their child?

10 Büchner, first draft, part two, scene eight, p. 77.
11 Büchner, first draft, part two, scene two, p. 69.
They refer to Christian as "the boy" rather than as an individual with a personal name. Marie has to remind Woyzeck that "the boy" exists:

Woyzeck. I got to go.
Marie. And your child?
Woyzeck. Oh, the boy!12

"He's seeing things," says Marie. "He didn't even look at his own child" (p. 29). The alienation between father and son is such that a caress frightens the child into running off, screaming as if feeling menaced. With Marie, it is the idea of having a child to raise that matters more than the needs and realities of "the boy" himself. "The boy is like a knife in my heart," she cries (p. 47), stung at her moral inadequacy in her role as mother, oblivious to the effect her remark has on the child himself.

At the same time, by such brutalization Woyzeck and Marie help to reconcile each other to their lot. By reducing her humanity to the label of whore, Woyzeck actually encourages Marie to forego the hopeless struggle for rehabilitation and to remain locked within the security of the way of life she knows. Relegating her to a whore and refusing to consider the possibility of her being anything else, Woyzeck unknowingly reinforces Marie's immutability. On her side, when Woyzeck feels he is being mistreated by his superiors, when he has any doubts about being handled like a second species, Marie is there to force him to see through to the hard economic facts of life. Woyzeck is sustained by seeing others as no better than he is in the matter of sacrificing human values for economic necessity, and instead of being played as melodramatically as he often is, he should be presented in the supple interplay between dutiful submission to his superiors and having the last laugh on them. Indeed, Woyzeck must defend his small shred of humanity to keep his sanity. Woyzeck knows, and covertly demonstrates to his tormentors, that however minimally, he still exists.

Scene eighteen, for example, is a comic scene of Woyzeck defending his battered humanity against his persecutors with that weapon of the weak, sabotage. In this scene Woyzeck's cooperation as the all-purpose medical assistant is essential to the success of the medical lesson, for a wide range of experiments must be performed, from dropping a cat out of a window to wiggling ears, with only a few seconds allotted to conduct each experiment in depth. But suddenly Woyzeck has become a withering flower who makes the big, strong Doctor and medical students do all the work themselves. When the Doctor wants to throw the cat off the roof, there is no cat, and when he calls to Woyzeck for an explanation, there is no Woyzeck. The Doctor rushes down from the roof into the laboratory and finds Woyzeck holding the cat; the students are waiting, time is flying, but Woyzeck refuses to budge, pretending to be afraid to disturb the cat because it bites. So the experiment must be abandoned, the lesson will continue in the laboratory, but this is not the end of the sabotage: Woyzeck still refuses to assist; now he has the shivers. When the time comes to examine Woyzeck himself, he suddenly, and for the first and only time in the play, feels faint, and, although his faintness could be entirely authentic, it is the timing of it that arouses one's suspicions, for instead of making himself accessible to

12 Büchner, first draft, part two, scene two, p. 70.
the students by standing up, Woyzeck frustrates their examination by having to sit down crumpled over in a chair. The Doctor wants him to cooperate in at least the final experiment by wiggling his ears. But Woyzeck would not think of making such an effort. "Oh, Doctor!" he sighs. It would be impossible for Woyzeck to stand up to his lords and masters, but the point is that he asserts his puny selfhood however he can. It is that—or surrender to the chaos.

On display here are survivors. And yet, let us also take into consideration the final mode of action the Brook company discerned, that the lK pay the price of their stability by punishing each other—and themselves—for their suffering, thus adding to the mountain Auschwitz a torture of their own making. Usually the punishment takes on the quality of a joke, as when a mother burns the hand of her son as he reaches for a proffered piece of meat. She does this as a joke, and, aside from Turnbull and the seriously injured child, everyone is amused. Tripping up an old man strikes the tribe as hilarious, and the victim himself doubles up from laughter as much as from pain. When the government finally sends food, each lK eats as much as he can before another steals it from him, the result being that they vomit up a supply of food that might have prolonged their lives for weeks. Atum says, "Look what we've done!" and starts to giggle. The giggling becomes infectious, and soon the entire tribe rolls on the ground in laughter.

The worthlessness of the human being in Woyzeck's society makes an apprentice feel so sorry for himself that he wants to "piss crosswise so that a Jew will die" (p. 44). It is easier to punish a Jew than the whole of society. Everyone turns on everyone else, and they all turn on Woyzeck. Woyzeck himself stands apart from his society, for he would understand his predicament, not just lash out blindly in pain; rather than succumb to Marie's sterile resignation—"Everything goes to hell anyhow, man and woman alike" (p. 33)—he would come to grips with truths about human nature. But Woyzeck is also a self-hating man, suspicious of his wife's adultery, plagued by hostilities and anxieties, tired and irritable from holding down two jobs, who has to work himself up to coming home by having a few drinks at the inn. His wife is a bitter, self-hating woman who wants one thing from Woyzeck—his paycheck—and at the same time recoils from his touch because his craziness "is catching."13 When they are together, explosion is inevitable. Let us see in production Woyzeck humiliating and denouncing Marie, the explosive acts of violence he surely commits against her, and let us see the relief he feels at exorcising his demons. Woyzeck is calmed by working off those anxieties and hostilities that plague him. Always receiving punishment, he enjoys the release of being in a position to give punishment to someone even more worthless than he is; a whore.

As to Marie herself, the essence of her sexual relationships is the absorption and administration of punishment. Sex with the half-crazed Woyzeck must be more like rape than making love, and she has had to put up with this for years. How is she treated by the Drum Major, a mountain of a man who hates staying sober and who likes to show people how tough he is? Imagine what it is like for Marie to dance with

13 Büchner, first draft, part two, scene two, p. 70.
him at the inn when he is drunkenly whirling her round and round, "grabbing her, grabbing her body" (p. 44). But if Marie can arouse passion she also knows how to kill it: the cold, brutalized lady mastered the contemptuous glare years ago to shame and frighten her father into keeping his hands off her. Marie does not see a lover as a human being, she sees him as a pair of "leather pants" (p. 28). Marie enjoys tormenting a pair of "leather pants."

All of the central figures in Woyzeck want to be punished for their alienation from experience. They seek out punishment. The dynamics of scene eight, for example, are a series of self-abasing power plays between the Doctor and Woyzeck: Woyzeck is manipulating the Doctor into punishing him; the plan backfires because the Doctor responds to Woyzeck's aggressiveness by wooing him. To be sexually possessed by a detested "second species" like Woyzeck would destroy the Doctor's identity as a superior person and would punish him for his vain efforts to attain superior status.

Although on a conscious level Woyzeck is struggling to convey his terrifying sense of chaos, an examination of the circumstances suggests that Woyzeck also wants to be punished for being out of joint with nature and his world. For note whom he has chosen to confide in: the most contemptuous and sadistic of his persecutors; and notice the timing—when the Doctor is in a rage—and also the situation: a confiding of intimate thoughts when the Doctor is tearing at Woyzeck's very humanity, demeaning him as a "dog" and an aberrant, jeering at his "philosophizing." An accurate translation is crucial here: the broken sentences and staccato rhythm stress the Doctor's mental agitation ("Now, who would get excited about a human being, a human being? If it were a Proteus that were dying—!"; the delirious racing from topic to topic reveals a character as explosive as Woyzeck is himself ("Did you eat your peas already, Woyzeck? I'm revolutionizing science, I'll blow it sky-high. Urea ten per cent. . . "). Woyzeck is pleading to human thunder. But as if these circumstances were not destructive enough, let us also consider Woyzeck's tactics in dealing with the Doctor. Seething over Woyzeck's having urinated on a wall, the Doctor struggles to compose himself. But Woyzeck will not let him. Either Woyzeck is incredibly stupid or he is manipulating the Doctor, for so far from being intimidated by the menacing situation—letting the Doctor calm down or placating him—Woyzeck intensifies his persecutor's agitation by insinuating that the man is as deranged as he is himself. That is not much different from an Auschwitz Jew, the subject of vicious experimentation, provoking his experimenter with the discovery that the doctor too appears to suffer psychological disorders. It is as if Woyzeck is begging for punishment. Thus he asks whether his jeering accuser has not also "seen anything of double nature" and, indeed, presumes to compare experiences of dementia with the madman: "Have you seen how [the toadstools] grow in patterns?" Let no one think that Woyzeck means nothing personal in his remarks. His inquiry about the Doctor's sense of double nature is asked "confidingly," and when he proceeds to compare their toadstool hallucinations, Woyzeck "puts his finger to his nose" as a sign of warning. Woyzeck has lived through oppression long enough to know that such insolence in his caste society is courting danger.

What Woyzeck does not know is that the Doctor has been responding to his aggressiveness on a sexual level, as part of his own unconscious urge to self-destruc-
tiveness. Thus, when Woyzeck finally quiets down, the Doctor becomes sexually manipulative. Other interpretations notwithstanding, what we observe here is not the politics of rape—the assertion of power and dominance over a person—but the politics of courtship, with the Doctor becoming ingratiating and admiring of Woyzeck. “Excited” by the thought of a superior being—“a Proteus”—“dying,” he commits an act of self-annihilation by wooing someone he regards as a subcreature. Instead of lashing out at Woyzeck for his insolence, the Doctor overlooks the incident; far from penalizing Woyzeck, he offers him a raise. He describes Woyzeck’s mental condition with such sexually provocative adjectives as “marvelous” and “beautifully developed.” Then, ostensibly to check his pulse, he takes Woyzeck’s hand, but only after cajoling Woyzeck into offering his hand by reminding him of the forthcoming raise. Indeed, “I have to feel your pulse mornings and evenings.”

The whole play is a freak show. The Barker and Announcer gaze on the crowd with contempt, reviling the freaks who are not fully human but have no animal vitality either. Woyzeck himself is less terrified and disconsolate because of his world than he is horrified at his own freakishness, in particular at his hallucinations. It is not unusual for victims of oppression to confuse acquired handicaps with failings in their own nature. Requiring the very norms that alienate him, Woyzeck also holds onto them as a means of punishing himself for that alienation: for his freakishness. Murdering Marie is his supreme act of self-punishment, for in killing her, he destroys all the sources of order and stability that she represented and that he needed to keep his sanity. In becoming a murderer he also establishes himself irrevocably as the social misfit and freak—“What’s the matter with you, Franz?” (p. 29), “fool” (p. 30), “dumb individual” (p. 30), “lowest member of the human race” (p. 31), “stupid” (p. 34), “Woyzeck, you’ve got no morality” (p. 35), “You’re out of your mind, Franz” (p. 37), “Franz, you’re delirious” (p. 37), “Stay here, Woyzeck. You’re running around like an open razor blade” (p. 40), “Stupid!” (p. 43), “dog” (p. 49)—that he feels he is and that the Captain and Doctor, his wife and companions have told him he is.

The Ik ends when the tribe, forcibly dispersed among other tribes, wander back to their homeland. Regardless of their circumstances with the host tribes, the Ik require their homeland where they can follow the norms they depend on for their survival. They are still there, and the production gives no indication of their desiring to change or in any way amend their way of life. In Woyzeck too, when all has been done, nothing has changed. Looking down at Marie’s corpse, Woyzeck once again feels things moving around him and hears threatening voices; to cope, he once again grips onto her label of whore: “black, black! Now I’ve made you white” (p. 55). Remorse over the murder is a luxury; getting away with it is his primary consideration, and his immediate regret is that he forgot to wash the blood off his shirt and neglected to throw his knife into the pond (p. 55). Like the Ik who return to their homeland, tomorrow morning Woyzeck will report for work, for to survive, Woyzeck requires even more than before to do “everything as usual.” Although the play could end on almost any scene, it would be appropriate to end a production of

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14 Blüchner, first draft, part two, scene six, p. 74.
the play with a repetition of scene eight, where Woyzeck tells the Doctor that he is still shaving the Captain, still eating his peas, indeed still giving his wife the money for the household, the same as ever. Being more isolated than ever and asking more threatening questions than ever—"Am I a murderer? What are you staring at? Look at yourselves!" (p. 54)—he would not ignore the opportunity to assert his aggrieved humanity by conning money out of the Doctor in his dead wife's name. Everything as usual for the voice-haunted freak and the society that created him—order and stability, punishment and being punished—as the play closes with the return to normality with the Doctor's line, ironically resonant, "You're an interesting case. Subject Woyzeck, you're getting a raise. Now behave yourself. Show me your pulse! Yes" (p. 39). "Let it die out," wrote Büchner about "antiquated modern society": "that is the only new thing which it can still experience."15

Compared with this approach, the usual staging of Woyzeck looks like an intellectualized Uncle Tom's Cabin, with Woyzeck serving as a kind of existential Tom. This perspective frees the play from the stranglehold of the conventional interpretation and makes it impossible to perform Büchner's classic in quite the same way again. Let us use this approach as a guideline for rehearsing Woyzeck in order to come to grips with basic qualities that heretofore have been overlooked.

15 Letter from Büchner to Karl Gutzkow (Strasbourg, 1836), Büchner, p. 128.

Lisi Mangold in Lovely Rita at Theatertreffen. See Theatre in Review, p. 112.