



“Peace to the Shacks! War on the Palaces!” Social Criticism in Germany prior to the Revolution of 1848

Reading of selected works by Georg Büchner
on the occasion of his 200th birthday
and Christian Dietrich Grabbe
with Christa Pillmann

Introduction: Michael Lahr

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The newer history of German Exile literature starts with Georg Büchner (1813 – 1837). Authors such as Ludwig Börne or Heinrich Heine, left their reactionary German homeland more or less voluntarily. Büchner on the other hand was politically persecuted when he fled to France: a warrant of apprehension accused him of treason. After Büchner’s death more than fifty years passed, before a complete edition of his works was published. Only at the beginning of the 20th century, during the period of naturalism and expressionism, the plays and stories of Büchner were widely recognized and successfully staged.

Büchner rejected the idealism of the Romantic movement and instead sought to realistically depict what he saw as the hopelessness of life in a world where isolation, monotony, and suffering prevail and are perpetuated by deterministic historical and biological forces. After having studied the French Revolution at the beginning of 1834, Büchner wrote to his fiancée: *“I find in human nature a terrible uniformity, in human relations an inescapable violence, given to everyone and no one. The individual is only foam on the wave, greatness is mere chance, the mastery of genius a puppet-play, a ridiculous struggle against an iron law; to recognise this law is the highest insight; to master this law is impossible.”* This pessimistic analysis is contrasted by the revolutionary tone of the “Hessische Landbote” (Hessian Courier) a pamphlet criticizing the social grievances in the Grand Duchy of Hesse. Under the title “Peace to the Shacks! War on the Palaces!” Büchner called the peasants and workers to revolt against oppression and excessively high taxation.

Büchner’s writings and the plays of his contemporary Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801 - 1836) represent the most important works of literature of the so-called “Vormärz”, the period between the Vienna Congress (1815) and the March Revolution of 1848, which was characterized by outward peace and the reactionary suppression of national and liberal movements.

Christa Pillmann will read the selected texts of Büchner and Grabbe. As an actress she has been working on many stages, among others at the Theatre of the City of Bremen, the Theater am Neumarkt in Zürich, Switzerland, the Theatre of the City of Münster, the Theatre of the City of Augsburg and the State Theatres in Karlsruhe and Saarbrücken. From 1983 until 1986 she was a member of the theatre group *Zerberus* and played in several of its productions, among others in the play *Ein Gespräch im Hause Stein über den abwesenden Herrn von Goethe* in Berlin, Frankfurt and Zürich.

She also starred in numerous movies and series on German TV, such as *Ein Sommernachtstraum*, *SOKO 5113*, *Tatort*, *Der Bulle von Tölz*, *Herz über Kopf* and *Die Aubergers*.

Since 2002 she has been a regular guest star at the Freies Theater Bozen (The Free Theater of Bozen). In 2011 she performed the role of Bloody Mary in the world premiere of Heiko Dietz’ play *Jane the Quene* at the Theater ... und so fort. Most recently Christa Pillmann has been touring with the production of James Sherman’s play *Die Romanze in D* and with Felicia Zeller’s *Kaspar Häuser Meer*.

Michael Lahr will provide historic and biographical background information.

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