

## Originality and source dependency

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A naive prejudice makes us assume that greatness can be equated with originality and that the literary genius has at his disposal extraordinary creative or – as we, people of the technological age, might rather call them - extraordinary inventive powers. The sober expert, on the other hand, would point out that the original meaning of the verb »invent«, the Latin »invenio«, is: »finding by accident« or »finding by systematic research« whereas the notion of novelty, of adding something completely new to the realm of reality that we have come to associate with the word, is only among more remote meanings. The expert might also point out that great writers have often borrowed from others extensively. Much of Goethe's early and successful drama »Goetz von Berlichingen« consists of borrowings from historical sources and – to mention a more recent example – many details in Thomas Mann's most famous novels are heavily source dependant. Georg Büchner, whose works we are in the process of editing<sup>12</sup>, is no exception to this rule. His texts are, in fact, source dependant to such a degree that even popular paperback editions routinely present at least excerpts from sources for the drama »Woyzeck« and for the story »Lenz«.

In preparing our edition we have done exhaustive research on the various sources Büchner must have used; we have developed techniques for editing both the writer's texts and his sources in such a way as to make the use of sources immediately transparent, and we have tried to distinguish various categories of source dependency in an attempt both to shed light on our procedures and to help other scholars draw interpretive conclusions from our findings. In the following essay I will briefly touch on these three areas drawing my examples from various works of the author.

## I. Researching and categorizing source material

A suspicion of source dependency arises when two texts are identical in a significant number of words or phrases. As a rule of thumb we told our students that three unusual words appearing in the same sequence in two texts was a minimum requirement to establish source dependency. In Shakespeare's »Richard III« (IV/1) the queen complains of sleepless nights and says: » For neuer yet one howre in his Bed / Did I enjoy the golden deaw of sleepe« which is in German: »<...> Genöß ich noch den goldnen Thau des Schlafes«. When Danton, while looking at his sleeping friend Camille Desmoulins, says: »Ich will den goldnen Thau des Schlafes ihm nicht von den Augen streifen« (»Danton's Tod« IV/3), he obviously uses Shakespeare's simile.

Experience has taught us to be cautious and to run a second check on our findings. Can we, for instance, be certain that the phrase did not have some proverbial quality at Büchner's time?. To exclude this possibility, we have to go through printed and electronic collections of texts to make sure that our phrase does not occur. If we find it only in Shakespeare, we consider him a likely source; if we find it more often we would downgrade our Shakespeare translation to the status of mere »sample text«. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Büchner used a great number of folk songs in his writings most of which did not appear in print until after his death. These later printed versions are, of course, mere sample texts. Earlier printed versions can be either sources from which Büchner borrowed the songs or, again, sample texts in cases where Büchner had heard and written down an oral version without being aware of the written collection.

How, then, can we distinguish sample texts from sources? The analysis of textual variants can be useful; determining access to or, at least, accessibility of a possible source can be of further help. Historical accounts – mostly by Büchner's friends and family – tell us that Büchner had access to and knew Shakespeare's work in the standard German translation by Schlegel and Tieck. Similar verification is possible for a number of historical sources which Büchner used for »Danton's Tod«, »Lenz« or »Woyzeck«. As a high school student Büchner read and studied a popular series on contemporary history that had its place in the family book case, and when he started doing research for »Danton's Tod« he checked out a number of books from the ducal

library in his native Darmstadt. In May 1835 Büchner was in possession of a handwritten report which the renowned Alsatian parson Johann Friedrich Oberlin wrote in February 1778 and which gives an eyewitness description of the mental breakdown of his house guest, the eminent young dramatist Jacob Lenz. This report is the major source for the novella »Lenz«.

If, in this way, we can prove actual access we speak of »verified sources« (»bezeugte Quellen«). Wherever real access is uncertain and only accessibility can be proven we speak of »uncertain sources« (»nicht gesicherte Quellen«). This applies to a number of possible historical sources for »Danton's Tod«. We have no record that Büchner actually read them; yet the textual correspondences are so extensive and so accurate in detail that they can be explained only by the process of reading and copying. The same is true for the major historical sources for »Woyzeck«. The first one – just recently discovered – is the prosecutor's report on a murder committed in Darmstadt in 1816; the second and much more prominent one is a doctor's lengthy analysis of the mental condition of Johann Christian Woyzeck, who killed a woman in 1821 and was executed three years later after the medical expert had established his sanity. In both cases we have no reports of actual access. Accessibility on the other hand can easily be demonstrated. We, therefore, consider these reports »nicht gesicherte« sources.

For reasons still to be shown, we group sources also according to subject matter and thus distinguish between historical, literary and other sources. Historical sources (including biographical and psychiatric reports) are of both structural and verbal importance in »Danton's Tod«, »Lenz« and »Woyzeck«, and even the comedy »Leonce und Lena« draws upon a published report on the ceremonies accompanying a dynastic marriage in 1833. The second group consists of literary sources. Through our research we can more or less confirm reports by Büchner's contemporaries and conclude that the young writer must have been an admirer and avid reader of Shakespeare, the young Goethe, Jean Paul and the major figures of German Romanticism. From other evidence we know that he read Jacob Lenz and – from among his contemporaries – Heine and Alfred de Musset. Like everybody who grew up in the Lutheran parts of Germany he had a good knowledge of both the Old and the New Testament.

A third group of sources consists of elements taken from popular culture. Beside the popular songs which I already discussed, proverbial sayings would have to be mentioned here. Some of them contain sexual allusions and are, therefore, almost impossible to find them in textual collections. And finally there are a vast number of elements taken from philosophical, scientific, medical and psychiatric sources.

To finish this brief survey, two further distinctions need to be mentioned- We try to establish whether a source dependency is a »trouvaille« or the result of research on the one hand; and whether it was copied or written down from memory on the other. This distinction tends to coincide with the difference between historical and non-historical sources, it sheds some light on the processes of text production and it also determines our methods of editing.

Büchner's borrowings from historical sources are most likely the result of systematic research and of copying excerpts and even longer passages from these texts. This is clearly the case in the preparatory phases of both »Danton's Tod« and »Lenz« when Büchner checked out books from the ducal library or got hold of Oberlin's report on Jacob Lenz. As to the psychiatric report on Woyzeck, it can be assumed that Büchner first read this report when he was a high school student and that reread the report carefully and even repeatedly when was writing the drafts of the drama.

Most borrowings from literary sources, on the other hand, are most likely quotations from memory. We should, however, not exclude the possibility that while he was writing »Danton's Tod« Büchner reread scenes from Shakespeare or Goethe in order to refresh his memory of the way in which these playwrights used either scenic elements or scenic techniques. Similarly, in »Leonce und Lena« Büchner's use of elements taken from Brentano and Musset is so extensive that it is more likely the result of systematic reading than of accidental finding. Other borrowings from sources, however, are most likely the result of accidental findings. This is particularly true for elements of plebeian language in »Woyzeck« some of which Büchner jotted down in the margin of his manuscripts with the intention of integrating them at same later point.

## II. Editorial procedures: highlighting source dependent material

An editor can present the result of his research in three ways: a) he can write a discursive text, for instance an editorial report, b) he can use a special apparatus, i.e. a lemmatized commentary, c) he can highlight textual elements. All three procedures have their advantages and disadvantages and we use all three of them in our edition. As a general rule, borrowings from literary, biblical or philosophical sources – mostly written down from memory – are relegated to the lemmatized commentary. Dependencies from historical and other sources of structural importance are highlighted in a special section of textual presentation, in the »source oriented text«. A further special section is reserved to the documentation of these sources.

Since the techniques of writing editorial reports or lemmatized commentaries are well known, there is no need to discuss them here. Highlighting techniques, on the other hand, are, according to our critics, an innovative aspect of our edition. I will, therefore, describe them in some detail.

Our highlighting signals are difficult to put in place, but easy to decipher.

1. Whenever a textual element from an established source is reproduced verbatim or – to be more precise – letter by letter in Büchner's text we present it in bold type. Such an element is usually, but not exclusively a whole word. If we take, for example, the major forms of the verb »to find« – »finden, fand, gefunden« –, we would if necessary mark as identical only the letters »**findet**« if the source contained the past tense form »**fand**«.

2. A specific source is indicated by a specific form of underlining (e. g. Mercier; Thiers; Nodier). In this way, we can signal that a particular word or phrase can be found in a number of sources, a phenomenon that occurs frequently in »Danton's Tod«.

3. An unbroken line indicates that a sequence of words appears in exactly the same order and without interruption in both the source and the text.

4. When we present a word in regular print and underline it, we indicate identity in

meaning but not in words.

5. We are interested in the genetic process of writing and therefore include source dependent genetic variants in our presentation.

6. In the margin we give further information about the exact place where the pertinent material can be found in our source documentation.

7. In our source documentation we present the borrowed elements plus context and we follow the same highlighting procedures.

Each volume in our edition of Büchner's literary, scientific and philosophical writings carries a »source oriented text« and a documentation of sources. We hope that this special form of textual presentation will allow our readers specific insights that they could not have gained in any other form. I will briefly outline two fields of scholarly interest which clearly profit from our presentations.

### III. Highlighting source dependencies as an instrument of genetic criticism

The colors on a geographical map allow us to distinguish at one glance valleys from mountains. Our source dependent text resembles such a map in that it allows us to distinguish – also at one glance – a) source dependent from non-source dependent parts and b) the different sources from which Büchner incorporated elements into his own text. I will give two examples of the insights which we have gained from having these distinctions mapped out in front of us in a clearly arranged and transparent manner.

1. »Lenz«: The primary source for this story is the above-mentioned report that Johann Friedrich Oberlin wrote describing the breakdown of the writer Lenz, whom the pastor had invited into his home in the hope of helping him regain his mental equilibrium. Oberlin's narrative, written immediately after the events took place, contains the whole story line of Büchner's novella but not all the details. It chronicles Lenz' arrival in Oberlin's house, Lenz' first calm days in Oberlin's presence, Lenz' Sunday sermon, Oberlin's departure from the village, Lenz' increasing religious anxiety culminating in an attempt to resurrect a dead child, Oberlin's return and Lenz' ensuing

mental breakdown. Büchner did not finish the story, and apparently left nothing but several fragments which the first publisher, Karl Gutzkow, arranged into a more or less coherent piece of narration. Our task was to reconstruct what the original fragments might have looked like, and our highlighted text gave us our first insights.

In our edition the text is 20 pages long. Of these the first 14 pages and the final paragraph of half a page contain elements from various sources. There are a few verbatim borrowings from Oberlin's report (= O), mostly verbal exchanges which Oberlin recorded; but for the most part Büchner took titbits of information from other sources illuminating, for example, Oberlin's religious beliefs, his life, the parsonage, the landscape.

[D3]	p.1-14; source dependency ≥10% borrowings from O and various sources			p. 20, 2 <sup>nd</sup> half; same as p.1-14
[D2]			p.18/19; source dependency ≥10%; borrowings from unusual sources	
[D1]		pp.15-17; 20, 1 <sup>st</sup> half source dependency 80%; solely from O		

Of the 5 ½ remaining pages a long passage of 1½ pages is dependent on sources that are largely irrelevant to the rest of story. Source dependency – when calculated in individual words – in all these parts is certainly less than 10%. The remaining four pages contain three very short passages that are apparently of Büchner's own invention; the rest is directly copied from one source and one source only – Oberlin's report (= O). The author's major textual contribution here is a change in narrative perspective: Oberlin used first person narration, Büchner switched to third person narration.

These observations were the starting point for a rather elaborate theory explaining the genetic development of the text. Büchner, we assume, approached his project by what amounts to little more than a copying exercise. From time to time he inserted inventions of his own into the text he was copying (draft 1). After some further research he tried another approach using different sources (draft 2); after still more research he

started afresh and wrote the first 70% and the final paragraph (draft 3). Combining these draft fragments Karl Gutzkow, the first editor, composed the whole story as we now know it, a story which came to be much admired first by the literary avant garde and finally by the general public.

2. »Woyzeck«: Büchner jotted down three distinct drafts. The first gives the basic story line: The young lover, a soldier, and his girl friend attend some outdoor amusements; the woman is attracted to another soldier, slightly superior in rank. The lover, becoming jealous, spots the woman dancing with the rival, falls into a psychotic rage and kills her. After the murder he attends a village dance and, as the last element in the story, washes his clothes in a local pond. – In the second draft Büchner added a few new scenes to the beginning of the drama, and during the final writing stage he mainly polished scenes taken from both drafts leaving off at the point where the soldier is about to kill his girl friend.

In the first draft Büchner borrowed from two sources: from the psychiatric report that claimed the murderer Woyzeck was sane when he committed his crime and from a prosecutor's report on a case that occurred in Darmstadt in 1816 in which Johann Schneider, a journeyman tailor, murdered his creditor under circumstances that in certain details closely resemble those in Büchner's play. At this stage both sources were of almost equal value. One major difference should, however, be noted: Büchner apparently had access to the report on Woyzeck but not to the material concerning Schneider. He quotes from the latter only from memory and restricts himself mainly to borrowing elements of the plot line. The equal weight that both sources had at this stage can help explain why the murderer is not yet named Woyzeck.

In both the second and the final draft borrowings from the report on Woyzeck increase in both number and importance. Büchner now changes his hero's name and thus turns what had been a fictional play about a man named Louis into an historical drama on Woyzeck. From this point on the second source lost in importance, yet it can still shed some light on the final scenes of the play. Whereas the first editor had assumed that Woyzeck drowns in the pond – Alban Berg's opera follows this reading of the text –, it is now clearer than ever that in the final scene Woyzeck goes into the pond



purely and simply to wash his clothes. #))

It is, therefore, through the discovery of sources and the establishment of a system of highlighting them in the text that new theories about the genetic development of Büchner's works could be developed.

#### IV. Highlighting source dependencies as an instrument for interpretation

In the second scene of »Woyzeck« the hero tells Marie of one of his phantasies, which in this case is inspired by the story of Sodom: »Isn't it written – and there was smoke coming from the land as from an oven?« I once saw an opera production in which Woyzeck read this sentence from a book. Obviously, the producer had picked up the signal »quotation«, but had misjudged the quotation's origin. Since in 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Germany Luther's Bible translation was better known than any other piece of writing, we can be certain that Büchner intended his readers to recognize all biblical quotations and allusions and any current reader who is a biblical illiterate will misunderstand the text.

This is not necessarily so in the case of borrowings from Goethe's »Faust«. Again in »Woyzeck« Büchner models one dramatic sequence after the scene in »Faust« in which Margareth discovers the jewels that Mephisto has hidden in her cabinet. After having borrowed several elements from Goethe, he went on to write: »S'ist gewiß Gold! [Wie wird mir's bey'm Tanz stehn?]« words that echo Goethe's: »Wie sollte mir die Kette stehn?« That was a bit too close and Büchner deleted the sentence. Certainly Büchner did not »quote« Goethe and most likely he did not even want to alert his readers' attention to the fact that he was borrowing from him. Yet, a comparison of the two scenes does, of course, enrich our understanding.

If we use the difference between »inspiration« and »quotation« as a guideline, what should we think of Büchner's use of historical sources? When Büchner wrote Lenz«, his major source was unknown to the public. It was published later, in fact almost simultaneously with Büchner's novella, but the place of publication was so remote that it took scholars more than half a century before they discovered the relationship. Can we safely state that in this case Büchner did not want the reader to recognize his source?

I am not sure. If Büchner had been able to finish his text, he might have rewritten the copied parts of the story in such a way as to make the source dependency less striking. But this only a speculation.

What about »Woyzeck«? When Büchner started writing the drama he named his hero »Louis«. Apparently he intended to write a play about fictitious persons, and the limited number of borrowings from sources was obviously »inspirations« and not »quotations«. When in the second draft he called his hero »Woyzeck«, he must have intended his reading public to recognize the name. Büchner's source, the psychiatric expertise on state of mind of the murderer Woyzeck, was published in 1824 and 1825 and triggered an extensive and heated debate both on the true or deceptive signs of sanity and on the merits or evils of capital punishment. Since this debate lasted well into the 1830s, we have to assume that Büchner wanted his play to be understood as a contribution to these general discussions. When »Woyzeck« was finally published in the 1870s, this debate had fallen into oblivion and the plot line, therefore, changed its character from »historical« to »fictional«. When, in 1914, the medical expertise was rediscovered, some of the play's original »historical« meaning could be reestablished. Recognition of sources is, in this case, essential to the understanding of the play.

I am not certain how Büchner would have reacted to the extensive documentation of sources in our »Danton«-edition. He was told by his colleague Karl Gutzkow that the play had received less attention than it deserved because Büchner »did not do history an injustice: because some of the well known bon mots made their way into the play and were spoken by the characters as if they were of your <the author's> own invention«. When people realized these borrowings, Gutzkow went on to say, they reacted as if the whole drama was nothing more than »a dramatized chapter« from Adolphe Thiers' »History of the revolution«. The discovery of source dependency – we have to conclude – resulted in a downgrading of the play. Did Büchner anticipate this outcome? He certainly made no effort to hide anything and, on the contrary, using Adolphe Thiers as a major source amounted to inviting the public to check on his »quotations«.

Even in this case, however, we can argue that the recognition of source dependencies can be essential to the understanding. The very language a speaker uses or

once used can be turned against him as a form of denunciation or unmasking. In »Danton's Tod« the dramatis persona Mercier looks at language in this way. Locked up in a prison cell together with the newly arrested leaders of the Revolution, Mercier draws their attention to the misery of the long-term prisoners around them and begins to quote slogans from their public speeches: »Equality swings its sickle over all our heads, the lava of the Revolution flows on, the guillotine creates a republic«. The misery in the prisons, he goes on to say, »these wretches, their hangmen are the embodiment of your speeches«; they mark the point where rhetoric »becomes reality«.

In »Danton's Tod«, Büchner certainly scrutinized the reality of modern revolutions. He may also have felt the need to scrutinize the language of the revolutionaries and to expose the fallacies of an effective but deadly rhetoric. He may, therefore, have felt the need to reproduce this language without making undue changes and today's reader should be made aware that he is confronted with historical phraseology, not with language of the author's invention.

### Realism versus denunciation

I am not certain that all of these suggestions are valid and, in general, as far as the source dependent part of our edition is concerned, I have more questions than answers. As much as in genetically oriented parts of the edition the source oriented sections are meant to be a service to a specific spectrum of readers and scholars and to open up lines of research and interpretation by presenting outside material in such a form as to facilitate in depth studies. Büchner's texts are remarkably source dependent and therefore suitable for pilot projects of both editorial and interpretative character. The core parts of the editorial techniques, the terminology and the line of research which we have developed in the course of edition should, however, be transferable to other authors and to other literary traditions.

<sup>1</sup> All references go to this edition: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe der Sämtlichen Werke und Schriften Georg Büchners. Mit Quellendokumentation und Kommentar (Marburger Ausgabe). Ed. by Burghard Dedner und Thomas Michael Mayer; since 2005: ed. by Burghard Dedner. coestablished by Thomas Michael Mayer. In particular: Vol. III »Danton's Tod« (in 4 volumes). Hg. von Burghard Dedner und Thomas Michael Mayer unter Mitarbeit von Eva-Maria Vering und Werner Weiland. Darmstadt 2000; Vol. V »Lenz«. Hg. von Burghard Dedner und Hubert Gersch unter Mitarbeit von Eva-Maria Vering und Werner Weiland. Darmstadt 2001; Vol. VI »Leonce und Lena«. Herausgegeben von Burghard Dedner unter Mitarbeit von Arnd Beise und Eva-Maria-Vering. Text bearbeitet von Burghard Dedner und Thomas Michael Mayer. Darmstadt 2003; Vol. VII »Woyzeck« (in 2 volumes). Text bearbeitet von Burghard Dedner und Gerald Funk. Herausgegeben von Burghard Dedner unter Mitarbeit von Arnd Beise, Per Röcken, Ingrid Rehme, Eva-Maria-Vering und Manfred Wenzel. Darmstadt 2005.