

## **Anabela Mendes**

Departamento de Estudos Germanísticos, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa

### **The body is a theatre of emotions. Büchner, Müller and Jelinek – brief crossings of depth and laterality<sup>1</sup>**

*Nature is perfect, it gives solutions to almost anything,  
and it will be beneficial to all if we emulate her in this.*

Elvira Fortunato<sup>2</sup>

#### **Opening with emotional reckoning**

How often do we remind ourselves of the perfection of Nature, how from it we may extract knowledge? The question may seem small, but it is not. It is possible that this relation-process no longer has anything to do with the protoscience that was the practice of alchemy, and that it is the consequence of the value that, nowadays, we still attribute in history to the manipulation of chemical substances with the aim of obtaining new substances. This horizon may be as infinite as Nature allows it to be.

Let us remember, for this purpose, Faust or Prometheus in their continuous and vibrant demands for empirical knowledge, naturally alchemical through the transformation of metal and other elements, and their conflict captivated by the confusion and fusion of theoretical knowledge with that golden deep that can only be reached in the mythical desire of going beyond, a manifestation of the self overcoming the self.

---

<sup>1</sup> Agradeço a Luiza Moreira a tradução para inglês deste ensaio.

<sup>2</sup> Elvira Fortunato is a great Portuguese scientist, recognized and awarded both nationally and internationally. She is currently leading an investigative team dedicated to building chips... from paper.

To access Virgílio Azevedo's article, featuring António Pedro Ferreira's photographs, see: *A física do amor (A Revista do Expresso, edição 2278 de 25 de Julho de 2016)*, pp. 54-59.

From this desire of creation, which emerges from the love of light and which articulates all, where heavy and light are inscribed, comes what we can achieve along a path we carve in all the seasons of life. And because it is so, we think of the pure joy of our work. Creation presents itself in many forms, as we all know, but the profitable relationship between what guides us as a model and that which we reclaim as a form of being born and perishing mirrors itself in these words of Elvira Fortunato, which gave me my motto.

In affirming that “nature is perfect”, the scientist recovers in her words that which is the expression of her cosmic soul, to which she turns when creating from physics, from the science of materials and paper as substance, a group of artefacts already in use in our present lives, but also to be seen in our future.

Paper electronics, her chosen area of research, is in this sense a kind of laboratory alchemical knowledge. Copying Nature may be then a way of elevating it, which means to create in its image, to love her multiplicity and heterogeneity, to focus on her details and on her vastness and her depths. Retrieving from her the inspiration to create a joyous path, one which we breath every day, and which intensifies in the smallest of gestures and movements, originating from simple actions, such as holding something in your hand, walking down a corridor, peeking through a half opened door.

Elvira Fortunato figures here because she appears to be a fulfilled woman, not just by what she builds for herself and for others, but also because she appears to have found a loving balance between research and her private life with her husband Rodrigo Martins, who is, like her, a scholar and researcher.

The article from the newspaper, *Expresso*, to which I am referring, features some photographs by António Pedro Ferreira which reveal what we may find living within this woman-scientist. They allow us, through empathy, to be surrounded by her world in unprecedented terrestrial bliss. The photographer appears equally attracted by the intense light that overflows and emanates from the body and facial expressions of Elvira Fortunato. Happy are his images of the couple walking on the beach, or at the lab where they both work.

Elvira's face shows itself as a subtle drawing against a back light that becomes landscape and merges with it, be it outside, or within the walls of a lab. Her facial expressions inscribe in her a stamp of emotional balance that we judge to be real, and which approaches us as a shared soul. It is from this natural fusion that her delicate smile is created, open, not vulgarly photogenic, and her supreme love of science and life.

### **Intermittent survival**

Georg Büchner occupied himself with science and with life, though for a short amount of time, allowing it, unsuspected, to escape him, since the research of the *Barbus* fish, which would finally grant him academic recognition, made him run dawn after dawn to the nearest river, where he could collect the *barbus barbus* of the Cyprinidae family and guarantee the day's successful dissection at the lab's table. Unfortunate was his untimely death, at the age of 24, when a *barbus barbus* infected him with typhoid fever. Notwithstanding this terrible fatality, Georg Büchner loved life and spent it in *methodical* intermittence between descriptive anatomic observation, interpretation, and speculative contemplation. It was in this fast movement of coming and going that he discovered sunshine in darkness, and through which he overcame a previously held notion of the imperfection of things and of beings. In similar fashion, he aligned the sense with the no-sense, paraphrasing himself in the thought of the protagonist of his novella *Lenz*: if there is no reason that justifies the place occupied by head and brain, then there is also no reason that forbids anyone from walking upside down.

Unlike what is possible to discover about Elvira Fortunato, a clear choice of lateral strategy that represents an emotionally balanced life, standing between light in shadow, we feel now that to approach the anatomist and writer Georg Büchner, a speculative man who possessed sufficient justification to integrate the fish species he chased into the organic totality of the world, places us in an area where operative

analysis, the act of considering the various realities which surround and define one, confounds us before a disquiet nature which does not wish to turn its back on anything, and which steals from loneliness and from imposed isolation (he had to flee to different territories due to his political opinions) that which is his uncertain destiny mirrored in the fascinating erring of the dramatic figures he creates.

Büchner the playwright, which Western culture finds easier to absorb, often ignoring the interstitial valences through which both doctor and writer journeyed, is also the thinker who dialogued with Spinoza and sought in Descartes the foundation of a method which exists to be re-evaluated according to practical necessity. We know today that Georg Büchner read the Dutch philosopher of Portuguese descent, specially his *Ethics* (1677), Part I – Concerning God, having also sought secondary sources<sup>3</sup>. But it is in his notes, highlights and scrawls relating to Spinoza, and some miscellaneous papers now archived, that we discover proof of his interest in finding in God the answer to the origins of the world in its relation to Nature and the cosmos, and, through Him, to consider his equals all human beings and living creatures. Regardless of this being “a substance composed of all infinite attributes”, God, that is, and notwithstanding all his absolute perfection by definition (*Ethics* Part I, XI), his revelation or manifestation appeared to Büchner to contain a carelessness with those who suffer, are imperfect and impotent, want to be loved but do not know how.

The Spinozian God thus brings to light the paradox of eternal and boundless divine goodness simultaneously united in essence and existence, whose effect, nevertheless, is not felt in human life. Enquiring, as did Spinoza, about the disconnected truths of empirical reality, Büchner never relinquished a personal relationship with God,

---

<sup>3</sup> The work of reference in this subject is volume 10, by Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, as well as two volumes by Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, edited in Jena, dated 1801 and 1802, respectively, concerning the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, and the posthumous compilation of Spinozian texts, *Opera Posthuma*. For further research see Henri Poschmann (ed.), *Georg Büchner; Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente*, vol. II (Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999), pp. 397 and 960-965.

asserting repeatedly in his plays that perhaps an imperfect and suffering God could better love his creatures in eternal feeling<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, can see him demonstrating, in smaller works, such as the youthful fragment *Traum eines Arcadiers*, written in the Winter of

---

<sup>4</sup> Henri Poschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-292.

The quotation below appears in German and it, along with all the other quotations to follow, both in footnotes in the body of the text, will be followed by a Portuguese version, translated by the author of the present essay.

The creation of a fictional dialogue between Spinoza and Büchner was an idea that occurred to me many years ago whilst explaining to students the passage below. At that time, the outcome was positive, and it was even possible to reference with them the style of the Socratic dialogue, with which they were familiar. We imagined Büchner occupied with his notes, perhaps speaking out loud, perhaps thinking of his Woyzeck, or of Camille. Accepting the difficult encounter with this language, we were surprised by the numerous interrogation points and the textual repetitions. We decided then not to integrate the authors in the passage. We gave them a body made of language, in the form of dialogue, characteristic of Philosophy and Theatre. We felt we spoke to God with greater dynamic and energy.

*“Gott oder die aus unendlichen Attributen, deren jedes eine ewige und unendliche Wesenheit ausdrückt, bestehenden Substanz, existiert notwendigerweise.*

1. *Beweis.* Wer es leugnet begreife, wenn es möglich ist, wie Gott nicht existieren kann. Sein Wesen involviert alsdann nicht Dasein, was idersinnig ist.

*Anmerkung.*

Dieser Beweis läuft ziemlich auf den hinaus, daß Gott nicht anders als seiend gedacht werden könnte. Was zwingt uns aber ein Wesen zu denken, was nicht anders als seiend gedacht werden kann?

Wir sind durch die Lehre von dem, was in sich oder in etwas Anderm ist freilich gezwungen auf etwas zu kommen, was nicht anders als seiend gedacht werden kann, was berechtigt uns aber deswegen aus diesem Wesen das absolut vollkommne, Gott, zu machen?

Wenn man auf die Definition von Gott eingeht, so muß man auch das Dasein Gottes zugeben. Was berechtigt uns aber, diese Definition zu machen?

Der *Verstand*?

Er kennt das Unvollkommne.

Das *Gefühl*?

Er kennt den Schmerz.”

*Espinoza: “Deus, ou a substância composta de atributos infinitos, dos quais cada um exprime uma essencialidade eterna e infinita, existe necessariamente.*

1829-1830, or later in the comprehensive and well-argued twelve pages of *Probevorlesung über die Schädelnerven*, submitted for his tenure exam at the University of Zurich on the fifth of November, 1836, how compared science and philosophy could complement one another as sisters in an intermittent stage such as life, rebuilt from place to place, in the way that only Shakespeare knew how. And that was exactly what Büchner's theatre (1835-1837) achieved so well.

Traditional bourgeois German drama was bound to offer resistance to the subjects Büchner chose for his plays. These, being contemporary (the French revolution, the arrogance of the small German states, a human life divested of choice<sup>5</sup>), acquired a new point of view that stemmed from the land and there it remained. It was the place of the hot and hungry crowd, it was the place, the places, of bodies in ecstasy and pain, without the right to choose or to assert. Not only did these subjects smash the marks of the social tissue fed by great inequality, but the form, the harsh sketch Büchner based his dramas on, did not fit into the idea of conservative and institutionalized theatre.

His short dramaturgy, *Danton's Tod*, *Leonce und Lena*, and *Woyzeck*, provokes in readers and spectators, to this day, feelings of

---

1.<sup>a</sup> *Demonstração – Negue-o aquele que conceba, se tal é possível, como pode Deus não existir. A sua essência não implicaria então a existência, o que é absurdo.*” (*Ética*, Parte I, XI)

*Georg Büchner: “Esta demonstração vai mais ou menos ao encontro daquela que consiste em afirmar que Deus não poderia senão ser pensado como existindo. Mas o que é que nos obriga a pensar numa essência que não pode senão ser pensada como existindo?”*

*A doutrina forçou-nos a pensar que aquilo que existe em si ou em qualquer outra coisa, não pode ser pensado senão como existindo, o que nos dá então o direito, exactamente por essa razão, de fazer dessa essência a perfeição absoluta, Deus?*

*Quando se parte da definição de Deus, então também é preciso considerar a sua existência. Mas o que é que nos dá o direito de formularmos esta definição?*

*O entendimento?*

*Ele conhece a imperfeição.*

*O sentimento?*

*Ele conhece a dor.*” (Anotação de GB a *Ética*, Parte I, XI)

<sup>5</sup> Ver a este propósito Anabela Mendes, “O corpo continua a monte e a assombrar: Um tributo a Georg Büchner” (*Teatro e Memória, Sinais de Cena, Revista de Estudos de Teatro e Artes Performativas*, série II, n.º 1, Junho de 2016), pp. 93-100.

strangeness that hover over everything, and to which no recollection is attached, even when we watch the collapse and derailment of the dramatic discourse, often interrupted and kept in suspension. It is in the silences that we try to *read* what was written and is being represented, expecting to hear that everything is losing meaning and that the Spinozian God, protagonist of a philosophy of immanence, continues to be a transcendence impossible to assimilate by the necessity to reinvent meaning, and to reinvent it in ourselves.

Büchner's gaze upon things, situations, people, becomes oftentimes terrifying. For this reason, it turns into a persistence, because reality is only ever partially perceivable, which imposes a multiplicity of perspectives, and the rejection of a unified vision, or, alternatively, encourages a distancing in relation to the unfolding of the theatrical events, directed, precisely, to detail. But it is the awareness of this partiality, which we don't often recognize, perhaps due to distraction or fear, that makes us truly understand how we live: in successive intermittence. This is why, in lucid-diagnosis Büchner knew well what he lived and how. Aware of the limitations and repetitions of reality (as demonstrated by the cycle of life and death), the anatomist-playwright concerns himself with the intensification of experience, of what exists and of himself, in name of the immanent things that cross his path, of the concrete situations he is involved in, always aware of people who understand him, or not. Büchner makes a point of never disposing of the principles that sustain the way he feels, body and soul: philosophy has to be concerned exclusively with "human things"; philosophy has to use "human language"<sup>6</sup>.

Flawed, like us, philosophy, but also science and literature, offer to the free thinker the base to a new dramaturgy: that which reveals itself unfaithful to the written play because it finds it difficult to attribute to it a purpose<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Georg Büchner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Ed. Ariane Martin (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012), p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> The most paradigmatic case of this process of creation is in *Woyzeck* and in the four versions of a chaotic labyrinth (of life, of writing, of miscellaneous papers in bags beneath the bed), a puzzle for scholars throughout many decades. On this subject see, Enrico De Angelis (ed.), *Georg Büchner Woyzeck Faksimile, Transkription*,

But the truth is that Büchner innovated the theatre of his time. Imagine, through emotional and cognitive incapacity: not being able to write with the conviction of a full stop. It is thought that this near disconnect became more and more frequent as the author approached the conclusion of his last play, *Woyzeck*, the most incomplete and overflowing, the unruliest, the most human.

The novelty in Büchner, beyond the helplessness when faced with a full stop, consisted also in creating between his characters relationships ever more abstract and anonymous (see the paradigmatic third scene in act III of *Leonce und Lena*, or the dialogue between Danton and Julie, <II,5> from the play *Danton's Tod*<sup>8</sup>). Apparently turning his back to the world, by the unfathomable strangeness that surrounds the discourse of his characters, Büchner continues to defend his philosophical micro-program, granting him a double voice – that of dumbness and incomprehension – as if this were the answer to a silent dialogue, a crisis in spoken language revealed by the body. His strategy comes from recognizing the existence of a crisis in the values of the society of his time. But, more than that, it signals the presence of a change in the very conception of drama, be it with the integration of epic-narrative elements in his plays (a device Brecht would come to use in his plays and dramatic theory), or in the choice of subjects never to be accepted by bourgeois drama. If we look closely, *Woyzeck* is a white Negro, a refugee from Burundi, a cultured Mexican. Blackness does not depend only on skin color.

Insurgent, explosive, fragmentary, Büchner appears to have with himself a relationship in which the blood that runs in his veins makes him bloodless, melts the torn meat while it is worm and throbbing, exudes all secretion as a form of relief. This would seem to be the journey of a body that was traced with acute consciousness, which attributed to it various meanings between cradle and grave, but also, conversely, because his perception of the world derives from a refusal to approach

---

*Emendation und Lesetext* (München: K. G. Saur, 2002). See also Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, tradução, prefácio e notas de João Barrento (Porto: TNSJ, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Georg Büchner, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in zwei Bänden*, Band I, Ed. Henri Poschmann (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), pp. 47-50, 122-129.

different realities through one generalize perspective, a worldliness unanswerable until every detail is scrutinized.

### **Rhizomatic circulation**

Let us return to the words of Elvira Fortunato in the epigraph. Would we now be on the side of “the solutions for almost everything”, a kind of intermittent response which, in spite of projecting itself on a vague deep, has the particularity of implementing the awareness needed to live, and which not wanting to remember finds it impossible to forget. We reap here a kind of provisional meaning, which suits the imitative gesture, in which we continue without having to depend on the existence, or not, or happenings. We find that these will only concern us in part. Behold that partiality which the Büchnerian gaze strove towards. From this standpoint, remembering is a work done in the present, and which does not ignore that “almost everything” is what we do not have a solution for. We shall never have the solution for the Nature in us.

Thus, we wish to approach Heiner Müller, who always had in Büchner, and in Kleist, in Brecht, but not in Schiller, a higher reference that won't be dissipated. We only pay homage to those who affect us and skin us, teaching us to resist the attraction of the voices, obeying them, nonetheless, without really remembering how.

Perhaps here we may recall a botanized image to use as inspiration, one which seems to me to fit the profile of the German playwright and the demands that he established for himself whenever dealing with the anticipation between seeking and finding.

More attached to the feeling of search than to its conclusion, Müller used to remind the spectators of his plays that what mattered was to discover a passage, amongst the many available, through which to walk freed of the temptation to embrace everything.

This principle, however, which he flung at others as if it were a supreme good that would help them unpack the resistance imposed by nature on the body and on the mind, making them lighter and better

prepared for the many and powerful variations of his thought, he himself did not follow, inquiring repeatedly about the place of representation of his plays, a space unattainable, unless with a chisel and hammer, and fine tweezers: “[...] are plays or texts for which, for example, the place of showing is my brain or my head. It is in this skull that they are enacted. How is this theatre?”<sup>9</sup>

How to establish a connection between the space of the mind and the space of representation as artistic realization, when the first apparently wishes to annihilate the second, and thus become unachievable the purpose for which the dramatic work is destined?

This is where the botanic metaphor comes in, that of a rhizomatic structure that is always developing, over an uncertain and surprising sketch, at times bulb, and at others a tuber, or stretching in branches, or deep as a root, tall as a stalk or tangled as a bough. Out of all this apparent spontaneity, which always has its reason of being, were it not a product of nature, we may infer, nevertheless, that the rhizomatic tissue is ready to operate with modules whose order may be modified (in the case of the different protuberances), integrating mobility and transformation, characteristic of the creator, into its solidity.

It is precisely in this template of Nature that I find a parallel, perhaps intuitively, with anything that related to the way Müller wrote. Much of what he thought and felt was expressed in dialogues and interviews, repeatedly, suggesting a lot more than what he said. Of his thoughts and feelings when writing or acting, when he questioned the best place for his plays, nothing will be found to prove the texture of his own emotional thinking. The reading of his brain was forbidden to us, and even if we had the faculty to interpret its mapping, this would not suffice to judge of the mode and the models of interlacing of his ideas of very suspended emotion.

If we consider the proper figure of the rhizome in its multiple variations, perhaps in its intervals there is space for the phenomenon of *collage et montage* (I was drawn to the French language) which convert

---

<sup>9</sup> “Das sind Stücke oder Texte, deren einziger Schauplatz zum Beispiel mein Gehirn ist oder mein Kopf, In diesem Schädel werden die gespielt. Wie macht man das auf dem Theater?” Detlev Schneider (ed.), *Heiner Müller Theater ist kontrollierter Wahnsinn – Ein Reader* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2014), pp. 7-8.

Müllerian texts into something multidimensional. And if we pay attention to the fact that logic (what is under that logic) of his literary-dramatic discourse stems from the dense treatment of this selected information, which the author treats so that the original meaning or meanings are empowered, generating new enquiries.

Difficulty does not mean impossibility of understanding, but rather the need to work *together*, to create a feeling of empathy towards such compact textuality and vision. We may never reach the transparency of an ending, perhaps because of our stoicism, which interferes with how we judge our feelings, continues to be a desired emptiness, a kind of foretaste of death's release. Heiner Müller used to say that he wrote with his feet, an image revisited by Lenz and Büchner, and which he passed on to his actors: "[...] when a text does not reach the feet, or does not come from them, then it does not become an experience, being no more than mere communication."<sup>10</sup>

With his vocation to speak and explain, even if whispering the words in a monotone chant suggestive of timidity, but also a consequence of the many years smoking cigars, Heiner Müller was troubled with every deformity Humanity caused on itself (another reading of the rhizomatic metaphor) and saw, in the seeming lack of difference between the promise of a better future and its denial, a testimony of Man's betrayal of himself and of his own values and principles, whatever they be. A fair number of his plays have precisely this theme of betrayal, projecting its effects on the irresolution and persistence of the problem. The act of betrayal conveys and reinforces the expression of a feeling of guilt, not always recognized, but integrated into the so-called universal emotions. Betrayal, self-betrayal are acts difficult to identify in physical expression. Heiner Müller was a master at concealing his self-inflicted wounds, even though he was not exempt from manifesting them in writing, more than before others in a public way.

The imperfect history of Humanity leads Müller to pay, in art, an ethical debt. Firstly, he does it to himself, in an attempt to surpass his

---

<sup>10</sup> "[...] wenn der Text nicht bis in die Füße geht oder auch aus den Füßen kommt, dann wird er nicht Erfahrung, dann ist er nur Mitteilung." Frank Hörnigk (ed.), *Heiner Müller Gespräche 2 1987-1991*, Heiner Müller Werke 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), p. 712.

own limits, adapting to them, considering that *language is history*, as he often stated. Secondly, his own lived History had many crossings, and offered no antidote against the pain of betraying and being betrayed. In his true life story, which figures several losses and rebirths, are highlighted that which António Damásio called *emotions of the deep*, which correspond to the emotions of which we may have eventual conscience, but of which we are usually ignorant: “These emotions may be at work when we reflect on a past situation, or when we think of a situation that is still mere possibility.”<sup>11</sup>

The simultaneity of the above described nexus did not seem to perturb Müller: the author regarded the past and projected the future at the same time, without conflict. It was as if within his body and mind there played a *basso continuo*.

This singular internal positioning, which attached itself to his writing, manifested itself with a diffused countenance and discreet corporality which seemed, oftentimes, to be absent from the place occupied by Müller. I was in his presence on various occasions in the 1980s, sometimes for hours, and never could decipher his *mask*, which was so perfect. In the long forehead, blood pulsed visibly in exposed veins, leaving me to imagine the network of permutations and revelations that were happening at that very moment in his *emotional identity*.

## **Raised Voices**

To think of the Nature in us, in the way of Elvira Fortunato, does not seem, at first glance, to elicit great favour in Elfried Jelinek, the Austrian writer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 2004, which brought her notoriety, but no peace.

Heiner Müller stated, in the long gone 1980s: “That which interests me in Elfried Jelinek’s texts is the resistance they unleash against what

---

<sup>11</sup> António Damásio, *O Livro da Consciência – A Construção do Cérebro Consciente*, Tradução de Luís Oliveira Santos (Lisboa: Temas e Debates, Círculo de Leitores, 2010), p. 161.

is the theatre.”<sup>12</sup> And what theatre is, from this point of view, related to the indolent theatre that invested in entertainment, leaving out the countless, accurate and scary blows surgically dealt by Jelinek in everything that he wrote.

Could this not be a diverse path to reach a homeostatic commitment with nature and the world, as defended by Elvira Fortunato? A form of unwavering determination to follow that which a neoliberal, narcissistic society offers freely to art of writing and the art of performance? The conviction of the scientist towards laboratory work, aligned with the heart’s understanding of the fragmentary Whole, while finding in it the most profound legitimacy?

The scientist’s conviction before her work in the laboratory aligns itself to the heart’s understanding of the fragmentary Whole, whilst finding in it its most profound legitimacy. And how about Jelinek, what is her position when faced with the harmony of a Whole that, in her perspective, never was?

Politically and aesthetically insubmissive, the Austrian playwright adjusts her tuning fork (a competent and diversified musical formation makes her a composer, organ player, pianist and a cellist) against an tentacular global society, increasingly mutilating and separating itself, instead of searching for relief and rest, that is to say, peace.

This is why the questioning of life and art, in Jelinek, happens in the very act of experimentation. Summoning multiple voices, she pursues in an associate, but also interruptive manner, minute unites, pieces of individual and collective memory, unrecognizable in the multiplicity of perspectives.

Like Büchner and Müller, Jelinek deconstructs, rebuilds and pastes together, but her texture has a tangled web, the apparent result of emotional and mental impulsiveness, through which she builds her endless textual nets. It is with the help of figures distorted by discourse, which surprise and confront us, an antinomy is created between what they show and what they potentially are, that we are challenged.

---

<sup>12</sup> “Was mich interessiert an den Texten von Elfriede Jelinek, ist der Widerstand, den sie leisten gegen das Theater, so, wie es ist.” Frank Hörnigk (ed.), *Heiner Müller Schriften*, Heiner Müller Werke 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), p. 311.

With a level of acidity often nearly intolerable, the writer repeatedly chooses to force her readers and spectators to measure the strength of what they believe they know (myths, legends, stories of Western History, songs, operatic scenes, films, movie stars, television ads, brands, mediatic publicity), but which suddenly becomes disquieting perturbation, almost always due to excessive entanglement.

The idea of overlapping realities does not foresee a feeling of condescension which could arise from the curiosity of following the new proposed mutations. For that there is no time, because the minds of readers and spectators alike writhes, and with it the body. In a movement of flux and reflux, the relationship with the Jelinekian textual propositions suggests a constant deformity of realities we do not know. Is denouncing a form of improvement?

In Jelinek's plays, an intermediation is projected between the person who was, or is, and the one who returns as a spectacle, ready to operate in them with resilience in the face of language itself. However, in the desire to form with the play a devilish pact of protection and support, the spectacle-being is by her devoured in the act of exposure, being subsumed by the rapid current that overflows onstage and projects itself in its own extenuation.

The body represented is not left in plain sight, because they are one and the same – in the shelter themselves and of their own *trail*<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> In a short essay, written by Elfriede Jelinek in 2000, about fashion, we may read one passage: "I push the piece of clothing between me and nothingness, so that I can remain there without anyone notice where I've been? Should the trail already be everything, that which thence results, a which soon must again disappear? Am I so possessed by the clothes that please me, because it dissipates my trail, no, that would be a dynamic action, an action as solitary as possible is preferable: my trail where I can loose myself so that no one will find me?" ["Schiebe ich die Kleidung zwischen mich und das Nichts, damit ich dableiben kann, ohne daß ich da war? Soll die Spur schon alles gewesen sein, die ja darin besteht, daß sie sofort wieder verschwinden muß? Bin ich so versessen auf Kleidung, die mir gefällt, weil ich dahinter meine Spur, nein, nicht verwischen, das wäre ja eine aktive Tätigkeit, sondern möglichst gründlich: verlieren möchte, damit auch niemand anderer sie findet?"] *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, März, 2000. Also found at <http://www.elfriedejelinek.com/>

Beyond the possible connotations of the author's discretion and timidity, referenced in a footnote in the autobiographical essay *Fashion*, I cannot fail to point out another aspect that comes from the extreme difficulty generally felt by actors and actresses who are working with the appropriation of characters and figures that do not dialogue amongst themselves, do not open their bodies to the expressiveness of acting, because that which they face is more like a polyphony of monologuing voices, which enact in Jelinekian plays the game between truth and non-truth, a recurrent theme in the author's work<sup>14</sup>.

To this spectacle-being, a kind of prefiguration of a false familiarity with the distribution of roles, from which the dramatic universe and its structure are built, the voices and insurrections attach themselves, thus prompting this being into running faster into loss and confrontation with their external limits.

The traditional statute of character, and even that of protagonists, tears itself frequently with extreme violence, opening in this way a path for the voices that come concomitantly with the text and embody it (after all, they are its meat and substance), but which are not exempt from coming from a different place, an unexpected outside, of wanting to say what others are incapable to. These voices, perhaps the same ones Woyzeck heard when he puts his ear on the ground, escape a specific location, speaking at time of favoured place (here we could consider the loved and hated Austria), in a simultaneously interior and exterior medium.

These are the voices we find, for example, in the work *Die Schutzbefohlenen (The Suppliants)*, which the author began writing in 2013, and apparently concluded in 2016, to which were added more parts: an appendix, a coda, an epilogue (Filémon e Báucis) as a stream of consciousness in which words are ripped out as historic testimony, and quickly become traces, denunciation, plague, vanishing into hundreds and hundreds of pages which lack a spokesperson, because the choir is a collective world, and a lack of differentiation between truth and non-truth to those who hope they will be allowed not to leave the world in this way.

---

<sup>14</sup> On this subject I wrote: *A serenidade por que elas anseiam nos intervalos da respiração em A Morte e a Donzela de Elfriede Jelinek*, Colóquio "Quem tem medo de Elfriede Jelinek?" (Lisboa: Goethe Institut, 20 de Outubro de 2015) (*Sinais de Cena*, 2ª série, III, Março de 2018, forthcoming).

This is the subject matter of this torrent of language (to call it a play, rehearsal or diatribe would be a diminishing act Jelinek would not understand). In its form, it is a play, and has been enacted<sup>15</sup>. Strategically, it is a political act that theatre cannot ignore. Its way of being gives voice to a terrible contemporary reality: that of the immigrants and fugitives of the countless wars and conflicting knocking on Europe's door, or entering due to mercy and favour, divested of the most basic human rights.

Here is the beginning of Elfriede Jelinek's play *The Suppliants*:

#### CHARGES

(The Suppliants)

We are alive. We are alive. The main thing is we are alive and it hardly is more than that after leaving the sacred homeland. No one looks down with mercy at our train, but everyone looks down on us. We fled, not convinced by any court in the world, convicted by all, there and here. All things knowable about our lives are gone, choked beneath a layer of appearance, nothing is na object of knowledge anymore, there is no more. No more need to try to grasp anything. We try to read foreign laws. They tell us nothing, we find our nothing. We are summoned but not seen, we must appear here, then there; but which land that's lovelier than this – and we don't know of any -, which land can we set foot on? None. We stand around unsettled. We are sent away again. We lie down on the cold church floor. We get<sup>5</sup> up again. We don't eat. We should eat, at least drink something again. We have some branches here, for peace, from the oil palm, no, we tore them off the olive tree, and this here too, all filled with writing; we have nothing else, whom may we hand this, this pile we filled two tons of paper with our writing, we had help with that, of course, noe we hold it up suppliantly, all that paper, no, we don't have papers, only paper, to whom may we give it?<sup>16</sup>

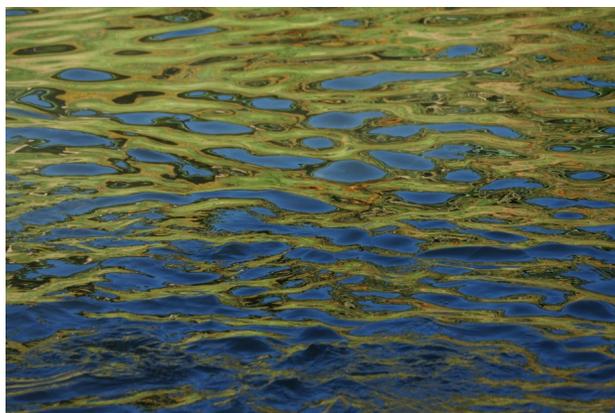
---

<sup>15</sup> A peça *Die Schutzbefohlenen* foi escrita pela autora para as Wiener Festwochen de 2013, a pedido de Nicolas Stemann para a rubrica *Komunne der Wahrheit*. Nessa altura o texto não teve qualquer aproveitamento. Posteriormente houve uma leitura pública em Hamburgo e, a 23 de Maio de 2014, a peça teve estreia absoluta em Manheim, seguida da estreia vienense no Wiener Burgtheater a 28 de Março de 2015 ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die\\_Schutzbefohlenen](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Schutzbefohlenen)).

<sup>16</sup> “Wir leben. Wir leben. Hauptsache, wir leben, und viel mehr ist es auch nicht als leben nach Verlassen der heiligen Heimat. Keiner schaut gnädig herab auf unseren

Mendes: *The body is a theatre of emotions. Büchner, Müller and Jelinek*  
brief crossings of depth and laterality

*The Supplicants*, an incautious title, makes the mute, silenced, exhausted voices, speak. They remain silenced. In them, *negativity* (Byung-Chul Han) can no longer relate to an inspiring exhaustion, that which is born and dies in bodies, being, who can choose between singing and dancing, contemplating the world from a beach or a laboratory.



*Barbus Barbus in Costa Rica*, 2016.

© Anabela Mendes

Image archive of Anabela Mendes

---

Zug, aber auf uns herabschauen tun sie schon. Wir flohen, von keinem Gericht des Volkes verurteilt, von allen verurteilt dort und hier. Das Wißbare aus unserem Leben ist vergangen, es ist unter einer Schicht von Erscheinungen erstickt worden, nichts ist Gegenstand des Wissens mehr, es ist gar nichts mehr. Es ist auch nicht mehr nötig, etwas in Begriff zu nehmen. Wir versuchen, fremde Gesetze zu lesen. Man sagt uns nichts, wir erfahren nichts, wir werden bestellt und nicht abgeholt, wir müssen erscheinen, wir müssen hier erscheinen und dann dort, doch welches Land wohl, liebereicher als dieses, und ein solches kennen wir nicht, welches Land können betreten wir? Keins. Betreten stehn wir herum. Wir werden wieder weggeschickt. Wir legen uns auf den kalten Kirchenboden. Wir stehen wieder auf. Wir essen nichts. Wir müssen doch wieder essen, wenigstens trinken. Wir haben hier so ein Gezweig für den Frieden, so Zweige von der Ölpalme, nein, vom Olivenbaum haben wir abgerissen, ja, und das hier auch noch, alles beschriftet; wir haben sonst nichts, wem dürfen wir ihn bitte überreichen, diesen Stapel, wir haben zwei Tonnen Papier beschrieben, man hat uns natürlich dabei geholfen, bittend halten wir es nun hoch, das Papier, nein, Papiere haben wir nicht, nur Papier, wem dürfen wir es übergeben?" (*Die Schutzbefohlenen*: <http://www.elfriedejelinek.com/>). Para este excerto da peça foi utilizada a tradução de Gitta Honneger. Elfriede Jelinek, *Charges (The Supplicants)*, translated by Gitta Honneger (London, New York Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016), p. 1.

## Works cited

- Angelis, Enrico De (ed.), *Georg Büchner Woyzeck. Faksimile, Transkription, Emendation und Lesetext* (München: K. G. Saur, 2002).
- Azevedo, Virgílio, com fotografias de António Pedro Ferreira, *A física do amor (A Revista do Expresso, edição 2278 de 25 de Julho de 2016)*.
- Büchner, Georg, *Woyzeck*, tradução, prefácio e notas de João Barrento (Porto: TNSJ, 2010).
- Damáσιο, António, *O Livro da Consciência – A Construção do Cérebro Consciente*, Tradução de Luís Oliveira Santos (Lisboa: Temas e Debates, Círculo de Leitores, 2010).
- Detlev Schneider (ed.), *Heiner Müller Theater ist kontrollierter Wahnsinn – Ein Reader* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2014).
- Espinosa, Bento de, *Ética*, Introdução e Notas de Joaquim de Carvalho (Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 1992).
- Han, Byung-Chul, *A Sociedade do Cansaço*, Tradução de Gilda Lopes Encarnação (Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 2014).
- Hörnigk, Frank (ed.), *Heiner Müller Schriften*, Heiner Müller Werke 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005).
- Hörnigk, Frank (ed.), *Heiner Müller Gespräche 2 1987-1991*, Heiner Müller Werke 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008).
- Jelinek, Elfriede, *Die Schutzbefohlenen*, 2014 (<http://www.elfriedejelinek.com/>).
- Jelinek, Elfriede, *Charges (The Supplicants)*, Translated by Gitta Honneger (London, New York Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016).
- Martin, Ariane (ed.), *Georg Büchner Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012).
- Mendes, Anabela, *Büchner em diálogo com Espinosa*, Ana Fernandes (org.), *Visão de Portugal por estrangeiros*, 3.ª Jornada (Viseu, Centro de Literatura e Cultura Portuguesa, 2004).
- Mendes, Anabela, *A serenidade por que elas anseiam nos intervalos da respiração em A Morte e a Donzela de Elfriede Jelinek*, Colóquio “Quem tem medo de Elfriede Jelinek?” (Lisboa: Goethe Institut, 20 de Outubro de 2015) (*Sinais de Cena, Revista de Estudos de Teatro e Artes Performativas*, série II, n.º 3, Março de 2018, forthcoming).

*Mendes: The body is a theatre of emotions. Büchner, Müller and Jelinek  
brief crossings of depth and laterality*

Mendes, Anabela, “O corpo continua a monte e a assombrar: Um tributo a Georg Büchner” (*Teatro e Memória, Sinais de Cena, Revista de Estudos de Teatro e Artes Performativas*, série II, n.º 1, Junho de 2016), pp. 93-100.

Poschmann, Henri (ed.), *Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in zwei Bänden*, vol. I (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992).

Poschmann Henri (ed.), *Georg Büchner, Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente*, vol. II (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999).