Ladies and Gentlemen,

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There are snags.

Red, could go on forever if there were no snags.

Yet in the conversation a conversation which, we

were on the conversation a conversation which, we

would be on the conversation. Death which takes place in a room, not

Death. Which takes place in a room, not

In this room, it is the subject of a conversation in

motion and his sense — without obtrusion.

excite him. His mythological validation in P9-

We've looked at him without — and this last phrase —

After you will remember is a puppet-like, inanimate.

Budding Prize, Dame Edith, 22 October 1960
Speech on the occasion of receiving the George

The Meridian


Four Performe Mandrop

Collected Prace

Paul Celan,
to is end, where all around Camille pauses and
words, not his, yet his — here where it all comes
feels as we own, through another person's
imagine Death with which we only two scenes. The other
Camille, a dream, a dream, I am contented to say
then other
whom Art
no, not the
And here where it all comes to an end, in those
they have heard in Together it is punting,
free voices, some — unmanned, voices —
de a few voices, every a chance to the occasion.
just that is like to
in pieces butcher, need only graphic —
not dead, resonant words, and they get them out: their
are all here, Camille, and the
Death are present. They take us to the place de la
The stage which held the conversation in Camillo's
Imagination, the scene where it stops,
and voice. I am taking of Death.
I am taking — you have long guessed it is she
Death.
Badgers work — Death, that is direction and
breaks, that is, direction and shape and also who could doubt it within
spare. Who perceives language as a physical
about. But who has the speaker, sets him
looks... and then does not know what it was
more precisely: something who knows, laments,
spoken who does not really listen.
So there is talk of art, there is often
Skepsis

Paul Celan
Paul Celan
Paul Celan

from something which seems connected with art.

I am looking for it here, in Lenz — now you are forewarned.

Lenz, that is, Büchner, has (‘oh, art’) only contemptuous words for ‘idealism’ and its ‘wooden puppets’. He contrasts it with what is natural for the creature and follows up with his unforgettable lines about the ‘life of the least of beings’, the ‘tremors and hints’, the ‘subtle, hardly noticeable play of expressions on his face’. And he illustrates this view of art with a scene he has witnessed:

As I was walking in the valley yesterday, I saw two girls sitting on a rock. One was putting up her hair, and the other helped. The golden hair hanging down, and a pale, serious face, so very young, and the black dress, and the other girl so careful and attentive. Even the finest, most intimate paintings of the old German masters can hardly give you an idea of the scene. Sometimes one would like to be a Medusa’s head to turn such a group to stone and gather the people around it.

Please note, ladies and gentlemen: ‘One would like to be a Medusa’s head’ to ... seize the natural as the natural by means of art!

One would like to, by the way, not: I would.

This means going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human,

but uncanny — the realm where the monkey, the automatons and with them ... oh, art, too, seem to be at home.

This is not the historical Lenz speaking, but Büchner’s. Here we hear Büchner’s own voice: here, as in his other works, art has its uncanny side.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have placed my acute accent. I cannot hide from you any more than from myself that, if I took my question about art and poetry, a question among others, if I took it of my own — though perhaps not free — will to Büchner, it was in order to find his way of asking it.

But you see: we cannot ignore the ‘rattling’ voice Valerio gets whenever art is mentioned.

This uncanny, Büchner’s voice leads me to suppose, takes us far, very far back. And it must be in the air — the air we have to breathe — that I so stubbornly insist on it today.

Now I must ask, does Büchner, the poet of the creature, not call art into question, and from this direction? A challenge perhaps muted, perhaps only half conscious, but for all that — perhaps because of that — no less essentially radical? A challenge to which all poetry must return if it wants to question further? In other words (and leaving out some of the steps): may we, like many of our contemporaries, take art for granted, for absolutely given? Should we, to put it concretely,
should we think Mallarmé, for instance, through to the end?

I have jumped ahead, reached beyond my topic, though not far enough, I know. Let me return to Büchner's Lenz, to the (episodic) conversation 'over dinner' during which Lenz 'recovered his spirits'.

Lenz talked for a long time, 'now smiling, now serious'. And when the conversation is over, Büchner says of him, of the man who thinks about questions of art, but also of Lenz, the artist: 'He had forgotten all about himself.'

I think of Lucile when I read this. I read: He, he himself.

The man whose eyes and mind are occupied with art — I am still with Lenz — forgets about himself. Art makes for distance from the I. Art requires that we travel a certain space in a certain direction, on a certain road.

And poetry? Poetry which, of course, must go the way of art? Here this would actually mean the road to Medusa's head and the automaton!

I am not looking for a way out, I am only pushing the question farther in the same direction which is, I think, also the direction of the Lenz fragment.

Perhaps — I am only speculating — perhaps poetry, like art, moves with the oblivious self into the uncanny and strange to free itself. Though where? in which place? how? as what? This would mean art is the distance poetry must cover, no less and no more.

I know there are other, shorter routes. But poetry, too, can be ahead. La poésie, elle aussi, brûle nos étapes.

I will now leave the man who has forgotten about himself, who thinks about art, the artist. I believe that I have met poetry in the figure of Lucile, and Lucile perceives language as shape, direction, breath. I am looking for the same thing here, in Büchner's work. I am looking for Lenz himself, as a person, I am looking for his shape: for the sake of the place of poetry, for the sake of liberation, for the sake of the step.

Büchner's Lenz has remained a fragment, ladies and gentlemen. Shall we look at the historical Lenz in order to find out what direction this life had?

'This existence was a necessary burden for him. Thus he lived on...'. Here the tale breaks off.

But poetry, like Lucile, tries to see the figure in his direction. Poetry rushes ahead. We know how he lives on, on toward what.

'Death,' we read in a work on Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz published in Leipzig, in 1909, from the pen of a Moscow professor, M. N. Rosanow, 'death was not slow to deliver him. In the night from the 23rd to the 24th of May, 1792, Lenz was found dead in a street in Moscow. A nobleman paid for his funeral. His grave has remained unknown.'
Paul Celan

Thus he had lived on.

He: the real Lenz, Büchner’s figure, the person whom we encountered on the first page of the story, the Lenz who ‘on the 20th of January was walking through the mountains’, he — not the artist thinking about art — he as an ‘I’.

Can we perhaps now locate the strangeness, the place where the person was able to set himself free as an — estranged — I? Can we locate this place, this step?

‘...only, it sometimes bothered him that he could not walk on his head.’ This is Lenz. This is, I believe, his step, his ‘Long live the king’.

‘...only, it sometimes bothered him that he could not walk on his head.’

A man who walks on his head, ladies and gentlemen, a man who walks on his head sees the sky below, as an abyss.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is very common today to complain of the ‘obscurity’ of poetry. Allow me to quote, a bit abruptly — but do we not have a sudden opening here? — a phrase of Pascal’s which I read in Leo Shestov: ‘Ne nous reprochez pas le manque de clarté puisque nous en faisons profession.’ This obscurity, if it is not congenital, has been bestowed on poetry by strangeness and distance (perhaps of its own making) and for the sake of an encounter.

But there may be, in one and the same direction, two kinds of strangeness next to each other.

Lenz — that is, Büchner — has gone a step farther than Lucile. His ‘Long live the king’ is no longer a word. It is a terrifying silence. It takes his — and our — breath and words away.

Poetry is perhaps this: an Atemwende, a turning of our breath. Who knows, perhaps poetry goes its way — the way of art — for the sake of just such a turn? And since the strange, the abyss and Medusa’s head, the abyss and the automaton, all seem to lie in the same direction — it is perhaps this turn, this Atemwende, which can sort out the strange from the strange? It is perhaps here, in this one brief moment, that Medusa’s head shrivels and the automatons run down? Perhaps, along with the I, estranged and freed here, in this manner, some other thing is also set free?

Perhaps after this, the poem can be itself... can in this now art-less, art-free manner go other ways, including the ways of art, time and again?

Perhaps.

Perhaps we can say that every poem is marked by its own ‘20th of January’? Perhaps the newness of poems written today is that they try most plainly to be mindful of this kind of date?

But do we not all write from and toward some such date? What else could we claim as our origin?
But the poem speaks. It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks. True, it speaks only on its own, its very own behalf.

But I think — and this will hardly surprise you — that the poem has always hoped, for this very reason, to speak also on behalf of the strange — no, I can no longer use this word here — on behalf of the other, who knows, perhaps of an altogether other.

This ‘who knows’ which I have reached is all I can add here, today, to the old hopes.

Perhaps, I am led to speculate, perhaps an encounter is conceivable between this ‘altogether other’ — I am using a familiar auxiliary — and a not so very distant, a quite close ‘other’ — conceivable, perhaps, again and again.

The poem takes such thoughts for its home and hope — a word for living creatures.

Nobody can tell how long the pause for breath — hope and thought — will last. ‘Speed’, which has always been ‘outside’, has gained yet more speed. The poem knows this, but heads straight for the ‘otherness’ which it considers it can reach and be free, which is perhaps vacant and at the same time turned like Lucile, let us say, turned toward it, toward the poem.

It is true, the poem, the poem today, shows — and this has only indirectly to do with the difficulties of vocabulary, the faster flow of syntax or a more awakened sense of ellipsis, none of which we should underrate — the poem clearly shows a strong tendency towards silence.
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The attention which the poem pays to all that it encounters, its more acute sense of detail, outline, structure, colour, but also of the 'tremors and hints' — all this is not, I think, achieved by an eye competing (or concurring) with ever more precise instruments, but, rather, by a kind of concentration mindful of all our dates.

‘Attention’, if you allow me a quote from Malebranche via Walter Benjamin’s essay on Kafka, ‘attention is the natural prayer of the soul’.

The poem becomes — under what conditions — the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation — often desperate conversation.

Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed, can gather it into a ‘you’ around the naming and speaking I. But this ‘you’, come about by dint of being named and addressed, brings its otherness into the present. Even in the here and now of the poem — and the poem has only this one, unique, momentary present — even in this immediacy and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time.

Whenever we speak with things in this way we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an ‘open’ question ‘without resolution’, a question which points towards open, empty, free spaces — we have ventured far out.

The poem also searches for this place.

Speeches

The poem?
The poem with its images and tropes?

Ladies and gentlemen, what am I actually talking about when I speak from this position, in this direction, with these words about the poem, no, about the poem?

I am talking about a poem which does not exist!
The absolute poem — no, it certainly does not, cannot exist.

But in every real poem, even the least ambitious, there is this ineluctable question, this exorbitant claim.

Then what are images?
What has been, what can be perceived, again and again, and only here, only now. Hence the poem is the place where all tropes and metaphors want to be led ad absurdum.

And topological research?
Certainly. But in the light of what is still to be searched for: in a u-topian light.

And the human being? The physical creature?
In this light.

What questions! What claims!
It is time to retrace our steps.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to the end — I have come back to the beginning.

Elargissez l'art! This problem confronts us with its old and new uncanniness. I took it to Büchner,
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and think I found it in his work.

I even had an answer ready, I wanted to counter, to contradict, with a word against the grain, like Lucile's.

Enlarge art?

No. On the contrary, take art with you into your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free.

I have taken this route, even today, with you. It has been a circle.

Art (this includes Medusa's head, the mechanism, the automaton), art, the uncanny strangeness which is so hard to differentiate and perhaps is only one after all — art lives on.

Twice, with Lucile's 'Long live the king' and when the sky opened as an abyss under Lenz, there seemed to occur an Atemwende, a turning of breath. Perhaps also while I was trying to head for that inhabitable distance which, finally, was visible only in the figure of Lucile. And once, by dint of attention to things and beings, we came close to a free, open space and, finally, close to utopia.

Poetry, ladies and gentlemen: what an eternalization of nothing but mortality, and in vain.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me, since I have come back to the beginning, to ask once more, briefly and from a different direction, the same question.

Ladies and gentlemen, several years ago I wrote a little quatraine:

Speeches

Voices from the path through nettles:
Come to us on your hands.
Alone with your lamp,
Only your hand to read.

And a year ago, I commemorated a missed encounter in the Engadine valley by putting a little story on paper where I had a man 'like Lenz' walk through the mountains.

Both times, I had written from a '20th of January', from my '20th of January'.

I had... encountered myself.

Is it on such paths that poems take us when we think of them? And are these paths only detours, detours from you to you? But they are, among how many others, the paths on which language becomes voice. They are encounters, paths from a voice to a listening You, natural paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves... A kind of homecoming.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am coming to the end, I am coming, along with my acute accent, to the end of... Leonce and Lena.

And here, with the last two words of this work, I must be careful.

I must be careful not to misread, as Karl Emil Franzos did (my rediscovered fellow countryman Karl Emil Franzos) editor of that 'First Critical and Complete Edition of Georg Büchner's Works
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and Posthumous Writings' which was published eighty-one years ago by Sauerländer in Frankfurt am Main — I must be careful not to misread das Commodo, 'the comfort' we now need, as 'the coming thing'.

And yet: is Leonce and Lena not full of words which seem to smile through invisible quotation marks, which we should perhaps not call Gänsefüsschen, or goose feet, but rather rabbit's ears, that is, something that listens, not without fear, for something beyond itself, beyond words?

From this point of 'comfort', but also in the light of utopia, let me now undertake a bit of topological research. I shall search for the region from which hail Reinhold Lenz and Karl Emil Franzos whom I have met on my way here and in Büchner's work. I am also, since I am again at my point of departure, searching for my own place of origin.

I am looking for all this with my imprecise, because nervous, finger on a map — a child's map, I must admit.

None of these places can be found. They do not exist. But I know where they ought to exist, especially now, and ... I find something else.

Ladies and gentlemen, I find something which consoles me a bit for having walked this impossible road in your presence, this road of the impossible.

I find the connective which, like the poem, leads to encounters.

Speeches

I find something as immaterial as language, yet earthly, terrestrial, in the shape of a circle which, via both poles, rejoins itself and on the way serenely crosses even the tropics: I find ... a meridian.

With you and Georg Büchner and the State of Hesse, I believe I have just touched it again.