Professor David Peimer | The Poetry and Theatre of Georg Buchner and Heiner Muller

- Welcome, everybody. Good morning or good evening, and welcome for joining us again, and such a pleasure to have David back with us. So over to you, thank you.

- Okay, and thank you so much to Wendy and to Judi, and appreciate, and I know that this is a really difficult time for everyone, and just hope that everyone is keeping safe and well. And thank you for joining on a Saturday, and it's an early dark Saturday here in England. So I hope things go well over the next few weeks, and that we all just have to hang tight, till the vaccine comes knocking on our door, which it is.

Slides are shared throughout the presentation.

Okay, I purposely chose two playwrights who are probably not nearly so well known in the world, because of their impact in Europe, I guess, in particular, but then globally as well, and how they link in a very contemporary way, Buchner and Heiner Muller, in terms of the key question for me, of how on earth does one think about staging history. Not as a didactic lecture, not as a version of a high school stand and deliver time, but as an exciting and theatrical, emotional, imaginative, visceral experience, using all the rich techniques and treasures that a theatrical experience can offer us. And these two guys are just really, really important.

Their influence started very, very small, but has become really influential, as I say, not only Germany and Europe, but globally. And linking to what we are doing with the overall lockdown university, and what Trudy's doing, and in a sense, what Patrick is, and Wendy and everybody else, because we are following an historical spine. And at the moment, we are in the '30s in Germany or the '20s coming up to the '30s, these playwrights, obviously, Buchner is not directly obviously that, but his main approach, which I'm going to get into, about how to stage history becomes so central to the question of our times of whether we think of "Schindler's List" or whether we think of the great Claude Lanzmann's epic series, "Shoah," how we think of representing extraordinarily horrific or joyous moments of history where the focus and one cannot get away from it.

And it really begins primarily with Georg Buchner. And then Heiner Muller is really post Second World War. It's writing up our period, in a sense, obsessed with the same theme, how to stage history. And in particular, he's looking at German history post-war and European and, in a sense, global history, but all emerging from the post Second World War context. So, because we are following that historical spine, I thought it's fascinating to look at certain theatres or these guys who have made it their mission, in a way, to explore how art and theatre can do this, with art, as I said, being boring, didactic and an a tedious polemic, goodies and baddies lectures sort of thing.

Okay, so to start with Buchner, what's extraordinary about this guy is that he lived for 24 years and then died of typhus. And the period he lives is so important, 1813 to 1837. I'm going to look

at him first, and then afterwards, we'll look at Muller. Buchner had this question that he wrote in a letter to his fiance at the time. And it's alluded to in one of his great plays called "Danton's Death," which is based on the French Revolution experience, and then the other one, "Woyzeck." So he dies of typhus at 24. Many critics later and many theatre theorists and cultural theorists, certainly in the 20th century, most have argued that Buchner might have rivalled Shakespeare, certainly outwritten Goethe, had he lived.

Because he only produced a couple of plays, three plays, and a number of poems, at his extraordinary young age. And yet the impact and the influence, as I said, globally, has been so, so huge. And Muller is one of them who picks up on that later. The question is, are we mere firm on the wave of history or not? It's a beautifully poetic image for me, 'cause it captures the rough energy of a wave, unpredictable and yet sort of guided, rough and can be wild and terrifying, or it can be gentle, whatever. And are we the firm or are we the wave? Can we surf the waves? Where does the individual, as history moves, can the individual really influence? Or is the individual just articulate or give voice to historical moments and eras?

We've looked at "Mein Kampf," we've looked at many other things, and it's the same in arts that I know Patrick is doing. Is the individual above history, or is the individual part of it? And in which case, can he or she influence it, change it? Is Mandela one of the great characters of history? Is it a shift between the two, a dialectic between history and the individual? Is he purposely made out to be the great leader and then rises to the occasion? This dynamic fascinates me because our times in terms of writing, I think, often try to combine questions of human nature and history. Whereas in olden theatre and older times, it would've been more religious icons, religious spirits, whether it be Christianity, Judaism, or the ancient Greek gods or the Roman gods, whatever, it would've been the ancestral gods and the individual's role in relation to them first and faith.

And that would dictate whether it's destiny or free choice, or whether the gods or God has some role in it. In our times, I want to suggest, my opinion is that it's much more the individual and the restless ebbs and flows of history. That is a key question for writers and artists to try and deal with. It begins with Buchner. Shakespeare has it, obviously, and many others. I mean, you know, right of the Henrys and Antoinette, Cleopatra, whatever, et cetera. But they're really just stories that he uses to explore his own time, questions of his own time, and what I've said before, this sort of cusp from feudalism to individualist capitalism, and the inner psyche.

He's the first to write soliloquies, inner psyche of character, and so on. But he's, I think, much more interested in human nature of his own society as opposed to specifically individual with history. Buchner is writing and living after the French Revolution. And that is the key absolutely massive historical moment of a whole epoch in European history, and how it influences America, obviously, and globally. So that's, for me, Buchner becomes just an absolutely central character. And because the French Revolution and the revolts going on in Germany and elsewhere, and what the French Revolution has possibly inspired for or against, in Europe and elsewhere, it is so fundamental to his writing, it cannot be ignored.

And I think it's a huge shift that he thus initiates. Okay, tragically for me, he dies at such a young age. What does he achieve before we come into the plays? He's a revolutionary, he comes from an upper middle class family, he goes to a private school, this guy, he's highly educated, and there's incredible energy and restless spirit that he has. Not only his youth, but I think in him. He's of the youthful revolutionary age, let's put it like that. And that he's read He's read so much other stuff, et cetera, and he knows history so well. He studies medicine in Strasbourg. He immerses himself in French literature. He becomes utopian almost.

He becomes almost revolutionary idealistic completely. And then the classic disillusion that kicks in afterwards. Driven by his own life and experience in Germany and by what happened with the French Revolution, he, in 1834, he's only 20, 21, he writes a revolutionary pamphlet critical of social injustice in the Grand Duchy of Hesse. The authorities arrest his colleagues and friends, torture and kill them. Buchner manages to escape, and he flees the border. And then he manages to get to Strasbourg where he studies to be a medical doctor, becomes a doctor, and he writes his thesis on cranial nerves.

Then he manages to partly flee to Zurich, and he's offered a lectureship at this incredibly young age, a lectureship at the University of Zurich. And that's where he spends his months, writing his final plays and poems before dying of typhus, and he's teaching in Zurich. So, he has these moments of revolutionary zeal of writing. He's a medical doctor, he's qualified, he's a lecturer in medicine, and so on. Many German and European and British and American critics all over said that, "He began modern European writing in prose, in theatre, in literature, in poetry."

Because what he was fascinated with was the ordinary individual riding the wave of history, whether foam, or whether in the wave, or swimming, or surfing, whatever image we want to use. It's because of his obsession with that, and the ordinary person, the ordinary guy, not obsessed with writing about the princes, the kings, the queens, the president, the revolutionary leaders, military leaders, et cetera, really not interested. Just the ordinary guy, the ordinary individual, job blogs and . But he's got such a passionate spirit that is so contemporary. The writing is so brief, it's so minimalist, it's so sparse. The scenes are so short and brief, they're jarring. They're written like fast action-paced movies in a way.

And you move quickly. There's no time to get bored. There's no time for the mind to meander and wonder while he's sitting and watching this play on the stage. He's not interested in excessive psychological detail. He's not interested in the jargon exposition in theatre, exposition of place, exposition of what's known as the psychological backstory of the character. It's like, let's get on with the action, what happens? Like, telling a story to a child. "Once upon a time there was elephant, Dumbo, Piglet," et cetera, and let's get on with it. Kids are not interested if Dumbo's huge, small, whatever, or Piglet, let's get on with a story, what happens?

And he finds these characters and moves with them and they're always rubbing up against or with the respite flow of history. Okay, so he's regarded by many as the beginning of modernism

in writing, and has been staged in many, many countries with many, many huge influencers. And the one I'm going to talk about later in particular, was William's fantastic production, William Kentridge, called "Woyzeck on the Highveld." And "Woyzeck" was one of his two great plays, really. And that was the first play that William did with Handspring Puppet Company that catapulted William to international fame, and where he crystallised all his fantastic artistry in sketches, in sound and music, adaptations of the European classics. He chose "Woyzeck," a play by a 22-year old German playwright of this era in the early 1800s.

William Robert Wilson, many of the other fantastic artists of our times in the last 50 years, went back to this guy, Buchner, and found modern contemporary connections, theatrically and in content. Okay, then in Germany, they've been on the BBC, have done operas. The BBC have staged often, you know, it's been shown here, "Woyzeck," in particular. "Danton's Death" is play about the French Revolution. It's been staged a huge number of times, because it's regarded the classic play of revolutions in history, 'cause deals with probably the ultimate archetype of revolutions, which is the French Revolution, which is the model in a way for revolutions globally, for understanding revolutions, in my opinion, anyway.

Operas have been inspired, atonal operas. Alban Berg did one and many others. Werner Herzog, his film in 1979, and "Woyzeck," can go on and on. In Germany, there's a very prestigious literary prize, called the Georg Buchner Prize, which is awarded annually, created in 1923. It's regarded the same level as Kleist, Heiner, Schuler, and the other great writers of Germany. I'm not going to get into a schoolyard debate on whether he really would've outwritten the rest. It's, I think, a bit silly and competitive, but in some ways, it's because of his contemporary feeling. Okay, I want to move on here to, so the key question that we are looking at here is how to stage history in our times. That's what I want to frame today.

This is Buchner, the complete plays and fantastic translations by the British playwright, Howard Brenton. And "Danton's Death" is one I've actually, also used Brenton's translation and my own translation and staged "Danton's Death," and many others, many others, from "Woyzeck," et cetera. And this is just an image, which is a painting from French Revolution times, you know? Okay, these are his two main plays that I want to look at a bit today. And in "Woyzeck," "Woyzeck" is based on an actual murder case that happened, and "Danton's Death" is based on, which is search all linking to history, "Danton's Death," obviously, is based on the French Revolution, okay? This is the original.

That's Danton on the top left, an original painting, and Robespierre on the top right. These are the actual guys of the French Revolution. They look quite different from the kind of mad, crazy image that we often see portrayed stereotypically, especially, of Robespierre. You know, Robespierre was this very acetic, very angular, Finnish, very emotionally repressed, clinical cold legal type. But I'm not quite sure, I mean, he might have been that in a way. And he's much more prim and proper in the painting. Danton was much more wine, woman and song.

They were all, by the way, middle and upper class, they were all educated. It's always the

educated leaders, often anyway, not always, who lead the revolution because they have the linguistic and perhaps, other skills as well, organisational and so on. Danton was regarded as much more of, he was much more the people's man, popular, and not only wine, woman and song, but engaging in life and fun and pleasure and enjoyment of his food and everything else. He wanted to have fun and enjoy life as well. Robespierre was much more interested in, I suppose, the principles, the intellectual theory of revolution.

The two great leaders as we know, and, of course, my right, the third one. So the three leaders of the revolution, in particular, these two in the play. At the bottom is a picture of a recent production in Germany of "Danton's Death." That's the actor they choose. And this is, for me, the classic archetype image of the actor playing portraying Danton today. You know, our perception is of a younger, virile, passionate, hungry for life and passion guy, compared to the very cold clinical angular Robespierre. Often the two stereotypes are set up against each other in productions of these plays or in movies.

But what I like is that in the bottom image is that the German actor here has got, for me, a resonance for today, a resonance of a more youthful Danton, not pockmarked, with the residue of various illnesses, that Danton had, on his skin and elsewhere as did Robespierre But a different kind of aesthetic, sort of virile young man image, in a way, which is perhaps more our image of the Revolutionary Leo from France. But the reality is different. The great phrase from Robespierre, because when Buchner wrote the play, he used about one-seventh of the play, is literally taken from testimony and the actual minutes of these guys' meetings and debates in Paris of the time. And this is an adaptation of a phrase from Robespierre. "The weapon of the republic is terror, and virtue is its strength."

And Buchner has adapted it to this phrase. It's an extraordinary phrase because it's so resonant to me of our times. It's about liberty, it's about freedom, human rights, revolution equality, end of the aristocracy, end of feudalism, beginning of a democratic world. But the weapon of the republic is terror, and the word is terror that Buchner used, which pre-dates, the use of terror and terrorist in so many ways, this phrase, this word, which strikes, I believe, such a resonant chord for us today. It starts with Buchner, and virtue is its strength. Virtue is obviously linked to what there was meaning in the French Revolution times.

But in our times, how many people justify that the use of terror in order to achieve something greater, something much better, dictators of the proletariat, so that in the future we will have democratic communism or socialism, whatever. How do these phrases are distorted and twisted in Orwellian news speak in a way? It begins with Buchner in terms of literary output. And he's understanding that, although it's meant to be setting up liberty, equality, fraternity, human rights, all the rest, et cetera, terror is the weapon in order to achieve freedom, honour, equality, virtue, all these words meant by virtue, this phrase from from Robespierre, which he actually stole from the Romans, you know, sort of the honour.

I mean, that double speak, that double link, and in the ends, the end justifies the means, et

cetera, all of those things. The debate of our times in history, for me, is captured in that phrase, which is much more from Buchner. And he's popularised so much in literature, not only in theatre. Okay, so for me, the classic meaning of what happens. We all know the story of the French Revolution. I'm not going to go back into it. What I'm going to say is that for Buchner, starting with ideals and being a young revolutionary himself in his early 20s and reading of the disillusionment, because of what happened. So Robespierre, has Danton guillotined, because, of course, they're fighting for who's really going to be the leader. Yeah, first they have to get rid of the aristocrats and the previous leaders. So they guillotined the bunch.

Then who's next? You know, and Danton was the one to institute the guillotine in the beginning, not Robespierre. And then got freaked out because he saw how much blood it was leading to, and not only aristocrats, were having their heads chopped off, but anybody who spoke against the revolutionary leaders. And how often have we seen that? The old story. You know, the opposition comes from within, not from without. Once you've wiped out the opposition, as Stalin does, as Hitler does, as so many other leaders have done, then you realise where's the opposition left? It's your own buddies or ex-buddies, the Trotskys and all the others, your ex-buddies in your own group, in your own party. So you start to move against them. And you start to chop their heads off, literally or metaphorically.

So Robespierre initiates it, and Danton gets sent to the guillotine. Even though he's been the leader, and he was famous because he led the French army, against the other European armies and the English, who were desperate to snuff out this pretended French Revolution as it was seen at the time. But of course, all the other nation states in Europe were terrified, they were building empires. They were terrified that the own aristocracy would be wiped out. So, all the armies of Europe were against it. The British actually financed and led most of the battles. And when Napoleon finally takes over, there's seven battles, major wars, which the British lead and finance, which includes Russia, Austria, Italy, et cetera, all the other countries, okay, for obvious reasons.

Then six months after Robespierre had Danton wiped out, Robespierre himself gets sent to the guillotine, only six months. So the illusion that I can wipe out my closest buddies, as I know Trudy knows much more than I do, fantastically done. A Hitler gets up, wipes out all the so-called enemies, the communists and this and that, everybody else, establishes his own extreme dictatorship. What does he do? Moves against Rome and the SA, and moves against his other very close ex-buddies. Anybody who's a hint of position, wipe out. Stalin, Trotsky, the same old thing everywhere. And then afterwards comes for Marat, and we know the story with Marat. So, what we have here is the classic story of a revolution, which is set up with all these wonderful ideals in history, historical moments, and the reasons going into the French and other revolutions, and then what happens?

It starts to, in Heiner Muller's phrase, which is stolen from Buchner, "The revolution devours its children." And one can look at many countries. One can even look at parts of Zimbabwe, parts of South Africa, post-apartheid, post the Mandela period, post the original liberation period in

Zimbabwe, what happened? How did the liberation devour its own children? How did the revolution devour its children there and in so many other countries around the world? What is happening in democracies today fascinates me because a similar approach, it may not be beheading and chopping off the neck, and as much physical blood, but how many of today it turns against their own buddies, their own close people? The story continues. Classic pattern.

And Buchner realises this all and puts us all into the play, with a restless energy of youth, and a restless energy of being such a modernist, I think, 21st century writer, where space and time, the scenes, almost Shakespearean, the art he's influenced, moves so fast and quick, and we get on with a dramatic action, and the play is like watching a fast-paced history movie, and it becomes exciting, theatrical and dynamic. It doesn't become a ponderous boring school lesson when we're 15 or 16. We're going to and regurgitated.

Okay, so it begins with this, and I'm spending time because I think that, in my opinion, these ideas of how to stage history has become how the media today. In democracies and in our globalised world, the media is almost staging history for us. And as the media, whether it's the internet and social media or Facebook or Instagram, whatever, or whether it's TV and et cetera, whatever, Netflix, we are seeing history staged in our lives. And I believe, for me, it's staged in our unconscious or our imagination in our own times. You know, pick up a phone and we can see what's happening in the world in five seconds.

So, we are staging history all the time through the media, which in a sense, the media is the stage our generation to experience history. And there's a huge change because we can flood it with so much information. You know, as I was saying last time about propaganda, we can flood it with so much information, so much propaganda and conspiracy theories, and ideas everywhere in the world. I'm not talking about one country, anywhere in the world, and see what connects, flood the media zone, and we see what connects where. And that, for me, has become our platform in a way of staging history. It's fought out in the battlefield of the media, and of course, as armies of today know in the jargon of cybersecurity.

And I think, one cannot ignore the different stages in a vertical that metaphorically the different stages that history takes. And I think one can do it through the media. And to ignore that is being naive and out of touch. He just understood only to, well, how to use the radio and Google's form and posters and so on. And today, we have a different stage to stage history and to influence how we want to stage it. Okay, so we know this here and what interests me about Buchner is that he takes these individuals, and a couple of others in the play who were very important individuals, during the French Revolution era, and he throws them onto the stage of history, onto the literal stage in a theatre, and watches them play out. You know, in Shakespeare's phrase, "We are poor players who strut and fret the hour upon this stage and they're not heard no more." So, we watch our characters strut and fret the hour upon this stage. I love that phrase from Macbeth. And we watch them in life.

We watch them, history playing out through the individual, and that's what Buchner

understands. And it's the first time a playwright does it. And the first time, in my opinion, a literary person does it. We watch them play out the history of their times through the individualist characters. And it's the desire for humans to individualise history. So, so much gets put on a name of this and this and what Buchner explores also in the play. How much are they mouthpieces the history throws up, whether it was literally this guy Danton or Robespierre, whether it would've been two other guys, who cares? And what his question is, are these individuals thrown up by history and that they find the words in the presence to articulate it, or do they also shape and forge history? I don't think there's a simplistic answer.

I think, it's a powerful dynamic between the two, shifting and flowing all the time. Of course, the individual influences, and of course, there's historical movements, but how they crash up against each other and how they fly with each other. And that's what he gets in the drama for the first time. Okay, and that of Muller and many other playwrights since Buchner, have taken from this guy. Okay, so then I want to move on with some ideas here of the other play, "Woyzeck." These images are from a couple of contemporary productions. There's one production in particular, of recently done in Berlin.

And Woyzeck has got, as you can see, Woyzeck is the ordinary working class guy, and at the bottom of the social ladder. These are some of the other characters around. As a very European theatre, it's much more visual than English theatres. There's an influence on the visual, not only on the spoken word, it's the visual, it's the sound, there's the music, and what you can create visually in a contemporary theatre space. England, it's more the actor and the spoken word. So here, it would be seen as quite a traditional approach to put in with a white face, there's mask and so on. He's almost puppet-like. As is similar to what William did with Handspring, "Woyzeck on the Highveld" where the puppets are in a similar kind of attire.

Okay, with "Woyzeck," he's dealing with a story about an ordinary guy who was a soldier in the army, and he's under the captain's power, and he's put on a medical experiment where he's only allowed to eat peas to see how long he can survive for his sanity as much as his physical health. How long can he survive eating peas only, it's an experiment. And he has to follow the order because that's the order from the captain and from the medical specialist. And he discovers during the story that his wife has had an affair with a captain and he freaks, he gets furious, and at the end of the play, he kills his wife and then drowns himself. Does he go crazy or doesn't he, it's influenced by "Hamlet." Is he acting it? Is he not?

Does he literally go crazy or doesn't he? There was a much later phrase attributed to a person who apparently knew Karl Marx quite well. He said that, "Germany is like 'Hamlet,' it's indecisive and an unsure in history whether to choose this or that. And then often makes an inverted comments the wrong choice or the different choice." But it's interesting to look at a whole society in history through the eyes of a theatrical character to understand one's own culture and history through the eyes of a character, which are just words on a page, say our national characters like "Hamlet," indecisive and can't decide with A or B, et cetera, then makes a decision this way or that. You know, so it's fascinating how, and that's what Buchner picks up on, how history

influences culture and vice versa, which is such a contemporary kind of way of thinking, brings in.

Okay, it was based on a true story about a guy who was subject to a medical experiment and ends up killing his wife. Because the other thing that Buchner, as I said, brings in is the fascination with for the first time with the ordinary Joe Schmo, the ordinary working guy, the bus conductor, the taxi driver, the whoever, the factory worker, whatever, he is the main protagonist of the player. And his journey is what we follow and what we identify with, up against the ebb and flow of history represented by the captain, which is the military, and the medical changes not only Buchner study medicine, but changes in science and in military, and therefore who rules the political state. An ordinary guy caught up in it.

Of course, he's going to obey the orders. He pees however long. It's questions of sanity, questions of medical experiments on humans, on creatures, but in particular, on the human. And who cares? It doesn't matter. He's just a working soldier. You know, he's a private, he's the he's the lowest of them all, who cares? So, and we go through his life, we don't over empathise, which is fascinating. What we do with the play like we do at Danton is we understand history through the individual, the history of class change without needing to reach reams of marks, and I'm not knocking marks, but one is to really get into that stuff.

But we understand the workings of history, and the ordinary working guy through one character. He's taken from a real newspaper article that Buchner happened to read, one murder, which was the first time that had been done as well. These things are so common these days, but we have to think of these guys originating this approach to theatre. You know, I was watching Sigmund Freud the other night. The radicalness of the guy in those days in Vienna, the ideas that he came up with, and what he would suggest, and how he was absolutely slated and attacked in every way is huge.

So the same for me, when we think of these guys in their times and we think of similar people in our own times, we're really trying to push the envelope in whatever way, and how we later can encapsulate, an important period of history, but through the individual, and to then try and put it on stage is a tough call. That's what they do. And that's what William picked up on "Woyzeck on the Highveld." He picks up on the ordinary, you know, it's an ordinary black guy who's gone through colonialism, apartheid, and he did the play of 2006, if I remember, you know, with his painted drawings and so on in the back, and the puppetry shows the poor unemployed guy from the rural area and I felt, he's just a servant or whatever, through the puppets.

And it's fascinating to me, remember having a wonderful conversation, William, at the time, why he chose that to start with, why he chose Woyzeck and Buchner to start with. And that really is what began an amazing career of an amazing artist. Okay, so a lonely soldier in provincial Germany, and how Woyzeck earns his money and he has to earn the extra money, so that's why he does the medical experiment. And it's a comment on the social conditions and on poverty as Kentridge picks up on later. It's on the poverty and how the morality is lacking in the

characters of the higher status.

And how this guy, Woyzeck, actually has a bit of simple human morality, just a simple sense of what's right or wrong, whatever, without sentimentalising it, that's vital. In the way that he picks up on the characters in Danton, in Robespierre and shows him wars and all. So, and that the captain is linked with wealth and status, but zero morality at the same with the medical fraternity with Woyzeck. He just picks up on the right and wrong, you know, can you have an affair with my wife or not? Can you make me eat peas for as long and see if enough or not? Okay, so one could see, I think, how so many of these ideas about staging history, about staging characters, the end of small guy versus the big guys, waiting for God ultimately with Beckett, he's also radically influenced by Buchner.

It's two tramps hanging around about a tree waiting for two hours for this guide a god, salvation, whatever, to pitch up and save them, rescue them, two tramps. Charlie Chaplin, so many others pick up on these things coming from the influence of Buchner. Okay, and then there's a guy, Arnold Strike, who is not related to but he was the very important German critic later, who really pushed the name of Buchner and his plays to say that he began this whole approach to literary modernism in theatre and in novel writing. He ended up in Palestine 'cause he fled from the Nazis and many other things in his life, no need to get into it. But after having being an assimilationist Jew in Germany at the time, he said, "He understood the knight of the burning of the books." His own books were burnt.

And he said that, "The crowd would've stared as happily into the flames if live humans were burning." He saw this with the burning of the books that the crowd would've stared as happily into the flames as if live humans were burning as well. That night, he left Germany, and went straight to Palestine, got in. He was friends with Thomas Mann, Brecht and all the others. He was actually nominated for the world prize seven times for literature. Prozionism and then the disillusion, the idealism, so it's just trying to, I'm not saying pro anti-Zionism, pro or anti-French Revolution ideals, et cetera, apartheids and wherever, just to understand how the changes of history happen in a moment of great revolutionary change, and how on earth to stage that in theatre. So it's effective, entertaining, fun and theatrical and profoundly moving.

That's my interest. From Buchner, "Revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children." Exactly the idea that I'm trying to suggest how to stage it, just understand the main movements in history. An amazing phrase from Buchner, "Whoever finishes a revolution only halfway, digs his own grave, where if you start a revolution, try and finish it or somebody else would dig your grave. Man is in ebus and I turn giddy when I look down into it. The stars prick the night sky. There must be great pain in the eye from which the tears drop. When I look up, I see the stars, they prick the night sky and a teardrop each time, but it glimmers in the light. The breath of an aristocrat is the death rattle of freedom. The breath of the aristocrat, is the death rattle of freedom." He's mixing all the time the understanding that everything carries its contradiction, is dialectic. Everything carries its opposite.

History is never a one-dimensional movement. It always has its opposite, which is going to throw up. "We are always on stage even when we are stabbed in earnest by our closest at the end." These are all from Danton. Okay, "Any leader can make us fall in love with any lie." He goes on and on about lies, and how contemporary globally that is. "We are only puppets. Our strings are pulled by the people who lie and unknown forces of history they lie about." And then a piece from "Woyzeck." "If we go to heaven, they'll put us to work in hard labour, captain, they'll make us work on the thunder in heaven." I love it, it's just poetic images. It just throws into natural dialogue. You can imagine anybody, you know, you go and watch the football together, people come up with these kind of poetic phrases all the time.

Kafka's influenced, Hašek is influenced, right? The small man, the reduced man in "Woyzeck," the forgotten people of our times, okay? So in all these plays, what I want you suggest is this kind of frenzy of the individual and the frenzy of the times, I suppose the mass hypnosis, this hysteria, if we look at our own times of the plague with the pandemic, and how many get caught up in this almost Freudian mass hysteria time, even medicine versus science in the 21st century. It's an insane argument, but it's there. It's happening real everywhere. Okay, we look at the role of charisma. I've mentioned that before with talking about Shakespeare and his comment about Hitler, and what a leader of today needs.

And a lot has been written, and Thomas Carlisle, the great British historian, wrote about Danton having the charisma of titan, which the red French Revolution needed, Carlisle writing one of the great pieces on the French Revolution. The bottom line, is there a fatalism in history? Is there an idealism? Do they constantly scrub up against each other? And I think in this moment of the pandemic where so many forces are being thrown up with a veneer of civilization is lifted as the same in a pandemic and moment of revolution, all these things come out. They're there anyway, but they come out. That's what Buchner brings to understanding all of this. Okay, does every revolution that transforms history have to advance in life? All these things are thrown up in this way. So, we have this coming from this guy.

And what I want to suggest is, for me, you know, as I've said in all these ways, there's Woyzeck on the right, how he has influence theatre today. There's another contemporary production of "Woyzeck" in Germany. And instead of a more natural or a more, I suppose, visceral image of poverty and poor in the right-hand side, we have a more arty kind of image or the artistic one on the left, not artistic, maybe it's the wrong word, but a more contemporary theatrical one. And all the time, the actors were moving along these ropes, which descended from the ceiling of the stage and on the back of the stage, up and down, snakes and ladders of history. And all these characters in "Woyzeck" are going up and down, creating snakes and ladders images of history, trying to imagize history in staging of "Woyzeck."

Okay, just to move on to Buchner and Muller. Buchner, "Revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children." And Muller, "Death to the liberators is the final truth of the revolution." All the time, Muller obsessed with history as well, post-Second World War, and obsessed with how to capture it on stage in addition, obviously, influenced by this young guy, Buchner. But the way of

writing twists and turns the language in the literary image. "Death to the liberators is the final truth of the revolution." I mean, so many words there, which are jargonized, but play with them and they resonate for a long time, I think. Heiner Muller, he's just died recently in 1995, Catholic German kid of the Second World War. And his obsession is this, "I have to deal with history because it has dealt so much with me.

Besides, on stage, you need an enemy," that's for sure, protagonist, antagonist. "German history is my enemy and I want to stare it into the white of its eye." And that's what Heiner Muller does. He's obsessed with German history, guilt, the Second World War, obviously, the Holocaust, everything of that whole period, and what it says to him about Germany, and therefore the world. And he sees it as an enemy, literally, and you can feel it in the plays, the obsession, you know, how on earth to cope with that rarely. The enormity, the magnitude of something, probably, the most cataclysmic events in history, how to deal with that rarely, in theatre, in literature, in writing. So, he takes Shakespeare's "Hamlet," and he spends yours writing 200 page version of his own adaptation called "Hamletmachine."

He cuts it in the end to nine pages. You know, it's after all his friends tell him, it's a disaster so long, he cuts it to nine pages to get it staged, and he stages it. And I want you to go back to this here. What he does is he looks at how to stage "Hamlet" in a way that I mentioned earlier, that Hamlet is indecisive, Hamlet is unsure. Does he take on his father Claudius, doesn't he? Does he take on the military dictatorship that Denmark has become? Does he revenge his father? Is it a dream? Is it a real ghost that he sees? His girlfriend goes nuts. His mother marries his uncle within a few days. He's a 21-year old kid, come back from the University of Wittenberg, he's studying philosophy. He's meant to be the new military and political leader of Denmark.

What's he going to do? Is he mad, isn't he? All these themes thrown up by the remarkable player of Mr. Shakespeare. And in the same way, Muller is trying to take some of those things and throw them in his "Hamletmachine." What is the role of the intellectual today? It's impotence because it may intellectually, understand many things or the artist, the writer, the painter understand, but can't change or won't change, or not gifted to change, or be part of firm history, firm wave, all of that individual fate, individual choice, fatalism of history. He's grappling with the same things in our own times. And the character of Hamlet, and it's an actor, plays Hamlet in and out of character all the time. Bob Dylan's great line, "Even the president of the United States must sometimes have to stand naked." So, he's in and out of character. Sometimes he steps back and we just see the actor.

Sometimes we see "Hamlet" trying to be acted. We have phrases like, "The terror I write of comes from Denmark. I stand on the shores of Europe, blah, blah, blah. At the back of me, of the ruins of Europe. Shall I get into the seat or go back to the ruins?" Goes on and on, the obsession with Europe, and what it has led to culturally and historically. He's the most frequently produced playwright in Germany. He's originally in East German, and writing plays there, regarded successor to Brecht, works for the Berliner Ensemble, directs him, becomes artistic director, wins all the prizes for Germany. And then, of course, is living finally, in the unified

Germany. He wants to create plays which show, is Germany brutalised history? Do Germans brutalise their own history? Do they reinterpret Do they change, don't they?

The Prussian Catholic, Protestant, all of those mixes. He's seeing the social characteristics, he's seeing the social, the psychologicals, by trying to use the character of Hamlet, and a little bit of Ophelia, Claudius and some of the others, to throw it up. He sees Hamlet as I said, on the cusp or the fissure, F-I-S-S-U-R-E, in German histories in European history. Go this way or go that way. What's going to happen in Brexit? Will England go this way or UK go that way? What's going to happen post-pandemic, this way or that way? What's going to happen, certainly, the debate in England? Is it a kind of a revolutionary moment in history?

Okay, so many of these, he has another player called "Germania," where the birth of a new Germany is formed by a sexual union between Hitler and Goebbels. Hitler is a kind of Charlie Chaplin, Dr. Caligari character, staggers on stage drinking gasoline, and he couples with Goebbels, and we hear this and others on stage, and generation of others, this cacophony of history of the information era of media-obsessed internet era, cacophony of Twitter, of internet, of texting, et cetera, the stage of history. And the characters in "Hamletmachine" tries to play out his little personal history on that stage, okay? And during this production of "Germania," Uncle Sam, the propaganda image of Uncle Sam needs you and America needs you, post the war poster. And at the top, there's Uncle Sam looking absolutely bewildered at Germany.

And a new Germany is born, half wolf and half pig, the golden neon swastika, descends, et cetera. And the great phrase from Brecht, "The bitch is back on heat again." It's all coming from Germany and his obsession of obviously with the German history. And in "Hamletmachine," there are lines that are taken from "Hamlet," lines taken from the ruins of European culture as he sees it. You know, the bits and pieces of paintings, of praises, of poetry and language, novels, in the jargon modernism. But what's interesting is how he manages to put it together, almost like a Tarantino way of throwing all these bits and pieces of history, film, paintings, literature, music, into this cacophony of theatre.

To stage it though, you stage it without the cacophony, you only bring that in occasionally, so the audience can follow and just chill and watch it. That's why Robert Wilson was so brilliant in staging it. And I was fortunate to work with Wilson on that production where in New York, he staged with so much silence and so much slow motion movement and energy, the opposite to the way that people often stage his work and often staged Buchner. He looked at the opposite of obvious theatrically. So ironically, the way to stage that is to stage it with gentleness, with silence, and only every now and then bring in the cacophony of the stage of media to allow audience time on a human level to feel and to think.

Muller talks about that, "We live in an emotional ice age." And upon it fascinating, said about his plays of, we communicate only too well. We're so educated, we have access to so many words and language. But the irony is that how we evade honest communication so well. and said, "All his plays were about how we evade honest communication." What about the jargon or the

failure to communicate, but we'll do anything to avoid it, evade authentic emotional communication. It's too scary, ironically, for a time which is obsessed with media communicator.

And Muller, in his own way, talks about how tepid we are because it's an nice age of emotional communication, and he portrays this "Hamletmachine" character in this way. And "Hamletmachine" is an image, you know, it's hail, hail coca-Cola, hail, hail, nausea. I live in a privilege on the airport behind my barbed wire, in my safe home. Is there revolution streets brewing? Is there change brewing? Is there a major historical change? All of this is happening, but either intellectual, either writer, either "Hamletmachine" character, who can't decide A or B, I just want to observe and I live behind barbed. I live in my own home. I don't want to be too much part of that whole future history, but I'll write about it, poems or whatever, and freaked out because I'm an a writer or an intellectual. I can't have an influence.

I'm stuck in the wave of history. And I guess that a lovely phrase from history actually, and this is written by Muller in the 1970s, when you wrote "Hamletmachine." Is history a vampire or a virus? And will it explode from within? I mean, the amount of phrases these guys pick up on and that picks up some how Buchner uses virus in relation to the French Revolution. These are unconscious connections, I believe, made through just a twist of the imagination. And the debate for in him in "Hamletmachine" is whether to become a machine-like artificial intelligence character, and just to hell with all that or to carry on and accept this dichotomy of loving the intellectual endeavour, the artistic endeavour, the imaginative, and leave up to the others, whether we have an influence on history or we don't.

The final comment from Muller from 1991, just after obviously the Berlin Wall falls. "What surprises me most about recent events, is not the tumbling of the wall, but the resurgence of nationalism, racism, and anti-Semitism. I thought these weeds had been pulled out, but the roots were left in the ground to sprout again." This is a playwright in 1991 in an interview, 1991 time of euphoria of possibly the unification of Germany, Europe history, the end of the Cold War. The West has won, communism has been defeated. This is what he sees going on. He's not so fascinated with the war. He could almost come He could see it happening coming. This is what surprises him. The resurgence of nationalism, and thought nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism in Germany he's talking about.

He thought his weeds have been pulled out, but the roots were left in the ground to sprout again. As Brecht wrote, "Don't underestimate, bitches are on heat and will be born again." So, to just end up with my final thought, how on earth to stage history, what for me is fascinating is that as we look at so much of Jewish history and world history of Europe and other countries, America and elsewhere, how do we imagine culture dealing with it? What is the stage? Is it Twitter? Is it internet? Is it Zoom? Is it linked to the physical stage in the theatre? Is it in our imagination more? Does it need the war on the streets or is it happening more through cyber?

The Russians are brilliant and the Chinese at what they have done, I think, personal opinion. Maybe this is my conspiracy theory on using these techniques to destabilise, how do you

destabilise from within? How do you create a plague, a virus from within, et cetera, to use a terrible metaphor five times, but it comes from Buchner and Muller, way before this current pandemic hit? And what surprises me is the resurgence of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism. And it happened before the coronavirus pandemic. It was there. What surprises me is that these weeds had not been pulled out by the Second World War, by the Holocaust, by so many other events, and how on earth now for writers, artists, grapple with staging history, so that it's not boring and pedantic. Okay, thanks very much, everyone. Appreciate it.

- Thanks, David. Another brilliant presentation. I see, I'm not sure if Judi's there, I think. Are you there, Jud?

- [Judi] Yeah.

- [Wendy] Okay, I see that there are a number of questions.

- [Judi] So David, if you could read them up and then answer them, that would be great. Can you see them?

- [David] Okay, yes, just one moment.

- David, read them after participants can hear what they are.

- Yeah, I can only see just one second.

- [Judi] So David, if you stop your screen share, it would be probably be easier, and you'll see the things at the bottom. There's nine questions on the Q&A. So there we go. And then if you click on the Q&A, there's nine questions in there for you, and they just scroll up to the top.

Q&A and Comments:

- Okay, thanks. The firm presumes the necessity to conceive an individual and communal dialect with a human sense of energy and find out absolutely. Thank you, that's from Romaine. Sarah, "Danton's Death" new version by Howard Brenton, yep. Translation from Jane Fry, Jane Fry was Howard Brenton's wife, absolutely

- David, David.

- [David] Yes.

- Please, read the questions out.

- [David] Okay, sorry.

- The people want to know what you're talking about and when you ask them, they'll understand what you're saying and what questions you're answering.

Q: Thank you. Sarah says, "'Danton's Death,' a new version by Howard Brenton from the translation by Jane Fry."

A: Jane Fry was Howard's wife. She was a professional translator and a friend of mine. Thank you, Sarah. "I lost her on Zoom in August before we know she was ill. She died in October." I'm so sorry to hear, thank you.

Q: Okay, from Elliot. "Didn't Sophocles and later Shakespeare, prefigure Buchner in staging historical dramas where individuals were swept up by waves of history?"

A: Fantastic, thank you. They did, and you're spot on. But where they're at, they're also added in the gods. Sophocles, it's the Greek gods. So, they have a role in the ancient Greek theme of fate versus free choice, and how much is dictated by the gods. So, it's destiny and yank got a free choice and how much free choice you can have. So instead of the gods, I think, we have history.

Q: Okay, Dion, "Shakespeare's purported to have said, 'There go the revolutionaries. I better follow them all. After all, I am their leader.' True or false?"

A: It's a great question, Dion. I don't know the answer. I'd love it if you could tell me. Okay, thank you. I don't know that one.

Q: Susan, "What have learned from different ways of staging 'Woyzeck' since Booker's death?"

A: Fantastic. I think, they've learned how to find, the best way is find individuals and stage it through that so we can identify with individuals, characters and their inner psychologies, et cetera, where they represent social class or that they're leaders or they're the ordinary working guy, like Woyzeck, whichever, through the ordinary individual in a social context. And through that, bring in the history, which is exactly what William does, William Kentridge, in his theatre. I think that's what they've learned.

Q: From Murmur. "Amazing, thanks. He one looks at Trump, who I guarantee has never read a book in his life, seems to have an inherent sense of how to stage a revolution and destroy those closest and is moving beyond his sphere."

A: I'll thank you very much for that, Murmur. I'd rather not get into very contemporary things at the moment, but what strikes me is how these techniques are perhaps not so new. They've been used again and again throughout history.

Carol, thank you so much for your comment, appreciate.

Q: Anonymous, "Where was Muller during World War II?"

A: He was born in 1929. So what was he? A teenager. He wasn't part of the youth as far as anybody knows. He was a teenager during World War II. Then from Daniella, "Thank you so much from Martin. Questions to be visible to all." Okay, that's all I can see here. Judi, I don't know if there's any, yeah.

- Thank you, that's absolutely great.

- Okay.

- So thank you very much. We're going to end up there. And I just want to want to say, we've got a couple of hard weeks ahead, but there is end in sight. And also, just want to recommend something that I've discovered, which is called Hu Chocolate. For those who are chocolate lovers who are going to be in locked down, eat Hu, at least it's organic and it's healthy and it's good for you. So David, you've given us lots of food for thought. And as you quite rightly, you know, we are not looking to get into political debates, but what we do, we like to pose the question and the debate so that all of you can take it home with you and ask the questions and debate it with your family and your friends. Because on this platform you can imagine, imagine there are almost 6,500 participants now signed up. So can you imagine all those devices, right, David? Imagine all those opinions.

- Exactly. And in the great Jewish way, please debate, be stubborn, argue, and let's fight with each other. And let's try and have a stubborn and argumentative and fun, passionate Hanukah and Christmas and break time and you know.

- Yeah, and we are just trying to create a loving.

- [David] Yeah, exactly.

- That's it.

- And the end is inside. Wendy, you're staging, in fact, it's not lockdown university--

- [Wendy] Love you.

- [David] You're staging loving university.

- Exactly, love you. So David, I love you. I'm very grateful. Thank you.

- [David] Thank you,

- Thank you to everybody. And on that note, we'll say night night and see you soon.

- Thank you so much. Take care, ciao.

- [Wendy] Bye, bye.

- Enjoy the chocolate.

- Yeah, thanks, bye.