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From Situation-Dependent and Chronic Boredom to Profound Boredom: A Study of Boredom in Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, *Lenz* and *Leonce und Lena*

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Abstract: The present article aims to analyze the traces of *situation-dependent and chronic boredom* and *profound boredom* present in a selection of Georg Büchner's works: *Lenz*, *Leonce und Lena* and *Woyzeck*, examining the implications of this imprint on the nineteenth-century thinking in general, and on Georg Büchner's thought in particular. Following Josefa Ros Velasco's research on boredom, not only the transition from situation-dependent and chronic boredom to profound boredom will reflect the impetus of an epoch imbued with a generalized tendency to the dominion of rationalism and over substance and nature, but also the gradual mutation that this deep boredom underwent—until it reached its most maladaptive variant—will turn out to be a symptom of this deep shift in thinking. The dawn of industrialization brought the well-known fragmentation of which Schiller had already warned: the loss of nature and art in favor of science finds its expression in Büchner through the constant allusion to boredom, as well as to the lack of communication that it sparked. Thus, boredom acts, in Büchner's oeuvre, as a warning against a generalized tendency to dehumanization of man by man. Among all the typologies of boredom analyzed, the particular category of boredom experienced by *Woyzeck* reveals to be especially interesting, inasmuch as it goes beyond a mere warning to this new hypothetical mindset, insofar as it wields the hope that the dehumanized modern subject still may be able to entrust to himself the maxim of *sapere aude*.

Keywords: situation-dependent boredom, profound boredom, chronic boredom, Georg Büchner, dehumanization.

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes boredom in the work of the playwright, writer, scientist and revolutionary Georg Büchner (1813–1837) based on theory by Spanish philosopher Josefa Ros Velasco (2025 [2022]). First of all, the arguments linking the social, cultural and political circumstances of nineteenth-century Germany with *situation-dependent and chronic boredom* will be developed, as well as the evolution of the latter to a *profound boredom* “distanced from its original nature” as a result of the emerging scientific paradigm (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 47, a. trans.). The first thesis of the article consists, precisely, of assuming the chronification of situation-dependent boredom as a feature that marked the subject of the time, which Büchner knew to reflect and portray in his oeuvre. The implications of the passage from a chronified situation-dependent boredom to one of a profound type will be numerous and of unprecedented relevance: a world without God will have to face the uncomfortable abyss of nothingness, in which boredom will become one of the main protagonists and threats to the human being. Moreover, this connection will serve Büchner as a starting point to criticize not only the absolutist conditions in the German territories after the Wiener Kongress, but also the incipient functionalism coming from France and England, which denied the concept of a self-sufficient human nature (Previsic Mongelli, 2009).

Utilizing Ros Velasco’s conception of boredom, the paper exhaustively analyses the plays *Woyzeck*, *Lenz* and *Leonce und Lena*. The selection of these works is based on their suitability to the object of study: they show signs and indications of a transition from a situation-dependent and chronic boredom to a profound type —the process that reflects the worldview of the transitional epoch in which they were written. In addition, the progressive dehumanization/animalization of *Woyzeck* and the automatization of *Leonce* and *Lena* reinforce Ros Velasco’s (2017) idea about the passage from a profound boredom that still possesses its original adaptive function to one completely stripped of it. In this context, Büchner’s specific use of the motif of boredom will be analyzed: the first reactive level of boredom will then become a fundamental property in his oeuvre as a whole. In fact, the impossibility of moving from the first reactive component (the awareness of the painful situation from which boredom emerges) to the second (the move to action, so that the bored subject manages to put an end to that given context) in the assumption of dysfunctional boredom (Ros Velasco, 2022) will have significant implications when exploring the underlying ideas in his works.

2. Theory

2.1. Current Approaches to Boredom. The Importance of Studying Boredom in Its Historical and Multidisciplinary Dimension

The kaleidoscopic and complex nature of boredom renders inevitable its study from different perspectives and approaches. Therefore, it is no surprise to ascertain the fact that there is currently no consensus among researchers as to the definition of the phenomenon (Elpidorou, 2015). However, most recent psychological theories of boredom do agree in understanding it as the result of a) “[the mis]match between mental resources and cognitive demands” or b) the fact that “[the given] task is not meaningful” (Westgate and Wilson, 2018, p. 691).

It is the feeling of restlessness that psychologists have found in bored subjects which prompts them to change their activity for a more stimulating one (Van Tilburg and Igou, 2012), an inclination which Elpidorou (2015) explains in Sartrean terms, understanding boredom as an emotion which “effectuates a magical transformation of the world” (p. 9). This elucidation of the phenomenon sheds light on its important liminal property, established between the subject and the environment: when facing “an exacting and difficult world [in which] all ways are barred” (Sartre, quoted in Elpidorou, 2015, p. 4), boredom signals the elaboration of a metamorphosed response; it is possible for the individual to defy the deterministic laws of the world, shaping, through the action of emotions, a new reality (Elpidorou, 2015). Elpidorou puts it in the following terms: “emotions change our world by changing our consciousness of the world [...] The transformation that emotions effectuate on the world might be magical, but it is not inconsequential” (2015, p. 4). As will be seen below, such a statement certainly holds true in the case of the boredom experienced by Georg Büchner’s characters: following Ros Velasco’s (2022) terminology, “the first reactive component of boredom” (p. 32, a. trans.) constitutes the ultimate proof of boredom’s capacity to promote a “not inconsequential” transformation.

Since the beginning of the century, empirical work in the field of psychology is demonstrating the potential beneficial effects of boredom, as well as “the antecedents, cognitive and perceptual concomitants, affective qualities, neurophysiological correlates, and outcomes of boredom” (Elpidorou and Ros Velasco, 2021, p. 37). For all the lack of consensus on a unified definition, there is a widespread agreement on the functions of boredom: its informative or signaling character is reaffirmed by numerous researchers (Bench and Lench, 2013; Elpidorou, 2015; Finkielstein, 2023; Ros Velasco, 2017), as well as its evolutionary, regulatory or adaptive function (Elpidorou, 2017; Finkielstein, 2023; Ros Velasco, 2017; Todman, 2003) or its communicative capacity, by means of which boredom informs “other people about someone’s attitudes, interests, values and/or beliefs” (Finkielstein, 2023, p. 11), thus “defending cultural worldviews” (Van Tilburg and Igou, 2012, p. 5). Similarly, previous and recent studies agree to specify certain feelings associated with boredom: the mixture of restlessness and weariness is found to be essential according to several studies (see Elpidorou, 2015; Fenichel, 1951; Fiske and Maddi, 1961; Hill and Perkins, 1985; O’Brien, 2014; Van Tilburg and Igou, 2012). All these recently discovered properties reveal an important particularity of boredom: its positive capacity to establish points of intersection between diverse and complex phenomena such as individuality, life within society, cultural products, evolutionary adaptations, psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry or neurology; fact which, in essence, highlights the complexity of the phenomenon.

By bringing together diverse approaches—including philosophical, psychological, anthropological, as well as sociological, among others—Ros Velasco’s theoretical framework constitutes a fundamental point of reference in the field of Boredom Studies, especially when it comes to developing a comprehensive and broad understanding of boredom. In this context, the role and function of boredom as a clarifying lens—which enlightens the cultural and literary researcher about the human condition and its infinite surfaces and depths—becomes crucial. If we understand it as emotion (Barbalet, 1999; Damrad-Frye, 1989; Scherer, 1984; Van Tilburg and Igou, 2012; Yucel and Westgate, 2021) and more specifically, as emotion in Sartrean terms—as Elpidorou (2015) interprets it—human reality ceases to be solely mechanical-empirical; it gradually discovers itself belonging to a broader realm: the sphere of possibility and will.

Precisely because literature belongs to that cosmos, it is necessary to bring up boredom; but even more important is to raise the latter in its historical dimension, as Ros Velasco does by taking into account “the history and historicity of the phenomenon of boredom”, tracing “the moral history of boredom”, and exploring “the ways in which our attitudes concerning the experience of boredom have been transformed through the centuries and shaped by various cultural forces” (Elpidorou, 2015, pp. 6, 37). Ros Velasco’s approach to boredom does not only look at the present, but gathers the prolific current findings on the phenomenon in the field of psychology and condenses them together with centuries of long philosophical and literary tradition. By synthesizing the modern approaches to boredom and bringing them into dialogue with previous philosophical and literary sources, Ros Velasco promotes what Toohey (2011) considers an essential step for the further development of Boredom Studies:

But what boredom is and what it isn’t is just the tip of the iceberg. Boredom lurks behind a surprising array of artworks, literature and films, as well as sociology, biology, psychology and philosophy. Neglecting to juxtapose these various manifestations of boredom, or privileging one over all others, risks losing some of the subtler shades of boredom and its remarkable history. Painters and novelists have an uncanny ability visually and descriptively to depict emotional states that puzzle or defy logic or reason. Through figuration and metaphor, art can grope beyond the limits of clarity and non-connotative language which quite rightly constrain the scientific disciplines, and tell us something about boredom without the need for a transparent linguistic term. But it also works the other way around: the science and theory behind boredom can re-illuminate certain very famous pieces of art and literature (pp. 6–7).

Owing precisely to the fact that this article attempts to trace boredom in the realm of literature (multidisciplinarity) of a previous period, but, furthermore, with the deliberate aim of analyzing it by means of an historical bidirectionality, it becomes natural to follow Ros Velasco’s theory, whose explanation of the nineteenth-century ensemble *ennui-spleen-mal du siècle* acquires a renewed insight and depth within the network of concepts concerning *profound* and *situation-dependent and chronic* boredom. Explaining Büchner’s selection of works in this terms follows precisely the maxim promoted by Toohey that “the science and theory behind boredom can re-illuminate certain very famous pieces of art and literature” (2011, p. 7). Ros Velasco’s theoretical framework follows this maxim and thus vindicates the need for multidisciplinarity in the field, as well as the historical present-past bidirectionality proposed by Toohey (2011).

Moreover, this theory overcomes the classical dichotomy between state boredom and chronic boredom (in other words, trait boredom, in this latter case), a fact from which arise both its novelty and recent success. In contrast to the traditional categorization, which distinguishes one type of boredom motivated by a boring situation (state boredom) from another of a different nature (the so-called trait-boredom) that appears as a result of a series of internal psychological traits and conditioning factors (Gorelik and Eastwood, 2023, p. 321), Ros Velasco’s framework goes one step further, insofar as it adds and remarks the substantial role of chronified situation-dependent boredom (or situation-dependent and chronic boredom). This typology stems from the chronification of state-boredom, but its successive prolongation over time makes it susceptible to transform into profound boredom. The same phenomenon applies to trait boredom: prolonged over time, it can become profound boredom (Ros Velasco, 2022). The importance of this progressive passage has fundamental consequences in regards to Büchner’s oeuvre; it is, therefore, the main object of exhaustive analysis.

2.2. Ros Velasco's Theory of Boredom

As a first fundamental premise, Ros Velasco (2022) defines boredom as “a symptom, a sign of discontent and contempt for what surrounds us” (p. 26, a. trans.). It is, above all, a call for attention to the environment (Ros Velasco, 2022) caused by the discrepancy between the subject's expectations and the surrounding context or situation (Ros Velasco, 2017) or, in other words “a state of malaise that we suffer from when the environment in which we find ourselves immersed in or the activity we try to engage in does not fulfill our initial expectations, resulting in the painful experience of meaninglessness” (Ros Velasco, 2023, p. 3).

Boredom thus reveals a crucial condition: it is always relational since it appears on the border between the individual and their context or environment (Finkielsztein 2024; Ros Velasco 2022). Thus, boredom has to be considered an illuminating thermometer that pictorially marks the portraits of world literature, especially when it comes to epochal changes, transitions and movements within a new epoch. It is always the context and not boredom that is the trigger; hence, the function of boredom is that of an indicator or signal: “[boredom] cannot be considered responsible for the reaction itself. Boredom is not the source [...] of either light or darkness” (Ros Velasco, 2021a, pp. 7–8, a. trans.). The nature and typology of boredom vary according to exogenous or endogenous factors. It can be conditioned, on the one hand, by environmental circumstances: given a specific context or situation, it either hypostimulates or hyperstimulates the subject, which consequently disturbs “the flow between the subject and the environment” (Ros Velasco, 2021b, p. 107, a. trans.). Attentional conditions can also play a key role if the individual possesses a certain difficulty concentrating (Ros Velasco, 2022); on the other hand, functional conditions arise if, concerning the cost (i.e., the effort required to perform a given activity), the subject considers that the benefit or value obtained by having performed a given activity is too low (Ros Velasco, 2021b).

The condition of boredom as a symptom is highly significant because it shows that, in *sensu stricto*, it is not a disease; however, its extension over time does make it dysfunctional (Ros Velasco, 2022). In *The Disease of Boredom (La enfermedad del aburrimiento)*, Ros Velasco (2022) establishes a typology of boredom based on four essential categories. The so-called situation-dependent and transient boredom—known as state-boredom in the field of psychology and psychiatry—is the most common and least pathological of all. It includes those cases in which an individual or a group is bored in a specific situation, but their boredom fades when the context changes (Ros Velasco, 2022). This type of boredom is functional since it arouses in the subject who experiences it a chain of reactions: firstly, the pain caused by “a situation that has not proved to be stimulating” triggers us to become aware of the environment and of ourselves, so that we thus begin an “introspection and [...] cognitive re-evaluation, awakening curiosity for what is in front of us and what is absent, the possible” (Ros Velasco, 2022, pp. 232, 227, a. trans.). This first level of reaction is essential, not only because it constitutes the starting point that allows the bored subject to devise a plan that promotes change in order to finally take action (Ros Velasco, 2022) but also because it contributes decisively to the formation and fixation of identity. Insofar as it “announces the possibilities of the being that lie dormant, that are latent” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 233, a. trans.), it makes the human being a cosmos in permanent intellectual evolution. Hence, functional boredom possesses a positive dimension: insofar as it signals a

potentially dangerous circumstance, it urges the subject to get out of the stagnant situation in which one finds oneself immersed, moving first to awareness and, secondly, to action, as it is distinctive of state-boredom (Blumenberg, 2006; Elpidorou, 2014, 2017, 2020; Finkielstein, 2024; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014; Ros Velasco, 2022, 2024; Toohey, 2011).

On the contrary, it is impossible to refer to functionality in the case of subjects who experience individual-dependent and chronic boredom. Due to their high propensity to boredom—either because of “their personality traits or a disorder of consciousness [...] due to some unknown issue at the neurological level” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 28, a. trans.)—they always experience boredom, regardless of the environment in which they are immersed (Greenson, 1951, 1953, with precedents in the works of Bergler, 1945; Bieber, 1951 and continuations such as De Chenne, 1988; Hamilton, 1981, 1983; O’Hanlon, 1981). These individuals are unable to conceive a solution that would put an end to their suffering “because the source from which it emanates is actually oneself” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 28, a. trans.).

The other side of dysfunctional boredom is the one that Ros Velasco (2022) defines as *situation-dependent and chronic boredom*. In this scenario, an individual or a group is bored because of an immutable context that they cannot modify, even if they wish to react—the impossibility of reacting lies precisely in the environment itself. Even if the subject, or group of subjects, can devise solutions to change the situation that produces their pain, the possibility of putting them into practice vanishes since the context that produces boredom always remains the same. This typology of boredom, which represents the ultimate overcoming of the traditional dichotomy between *situation-dependent and transient boredom* and *individual-dependent and chronic boredom*, is fundamental for the present study: by recognizing a situation-dependent boredom that, prolonged over time, becomes chronic—and whose origin can be traced back from a context that does not change (Ros Velasco, 2021b)—the motif of boredom in *Leonce und Lena*, *Lenz* and *Woyzeck* becomes meaningful in terms of the development possibilities of human potencies in the social, political and cultural circumstances of the time.

Suppose this category of boredom, or the other dysfunctional type, the aforementioned individual-dependent and chronic boredom, continues over time. In that case, profound boredom arises: this is, ultimately, “the most pathological type of boredom of all” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 29, a. trans.). The individual or group that suffer from it feel a “boredom in the face of life” that is truly difficult to appease, to the point that they cannot even identify what the source of their boredom really is (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 30, a. trans.). The fact that this particular type has “existentialist roots” links it directly to “the weariness of existence as it is, [to] melancholy” (Ros Velasco, 2021b, p. 108, a. trans.). Deep or profound boredom constitutes, according to Ros Velasco (2022), one of the main protagonists of Romanticism: in France it appeared in a new linguistic garb, embodied in the term *ennui*—its origin was a chronified situation-dependent boredom prolonged over time—which gradually manifested itself physically and mentally in the form of a disease (the spleen)—until, finally, it spread among the population, thus becoming the well-known *mal du siècle*. In this regard, the influence of French Romanticism on Büchner (Beise, 2013) also affected the use he made of the *ennui-spleen-mal du siècle* process as an evident motif in *Woyzeck*. What is interesting about this *ennui*—and, in general, about any boredom caused by the environment—is that, as Ros Velasco (2022) states, its “original disease

is society” (p. 133, a. trans.); thus, a large number of romantic works—or those of Büchner—are concerned with meticulously describing the relationship between the individual and society, with special emphasis on the effects of the latter on the former. It is, therefore, no coincidence that profound boredom—by which the individual who suffers from it has lost all taste or fondness for life, which becomes empty and useless—is one of the main constituents of universal literature, with a special imprint in the nineteenth century (Kracauer, 1995; Toohey, 2011; Valéry, 1964; see Ros Velasco, 2022, 2024).

In contrast to the dysfunctional typologies (*situation-dependent and chronic, individual-dependent and chronic and deep/profound boredom*) just described, functional boredom offers, as already mentioned, the possibility of changing and reacting to a situation which, for the subject experiencing boredom, has “become obsolete” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 27, a. trans.). Insofar as “it appears at the moment when we find ourselves totally adapted, forcing us to be in continuous movement”, boredom is in charge of avoiding an excess of adaptation in front of the situation surrounding us (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 44, a. trans.). Its role as a “necessary leveler of life” is thus crucial in human evolution:

Boredom acts as an essential and necessary leveler of life in adaptive terms because paradoxical as it may seem, it maintains a degree of maladaptation essential to sustain the state of alertness to future dangers or supervening changes, avoiding the excess of adaptation that would lead us to death. If in any sense we can say that boredom is positive, it is undoubtedly in this one (Ros Velasco, 2021b, p. 119, a. trans.).

Without this selective function, blindness would take hold of humanity. Our eternal conformity to the environment—that is, overadaptation (Ros Velasco, 2017)—would blur our differences with it, it would remove our individuality: the death of the spirit would then appear. That is precisely the imprint that, in the words of Ros Velasco (2017), “the modern cultural institution brought with it”: “a new type of boredom through oblivion: the most complex and distanced from its original nature” (p. 47, a. trans.). It is on this basis that the chronified situation-dependent boredom appearing in Büchner’s analyzed works has to be understood: a type of situational boredom which, prolonged over time (chronified), becomes a new category of profound boredom which has lost its original nature, an instigator of “compulsive and inordinate action[s], damaging the self-preserving labor to which it originally responded” (Ros Velasco, 2017, pp. 47–48, a. trans.).

Born, raised and educated in a scientific environment, Büchner was aware of this tendency to the negation of nature that science promoted, positioning himself “consciously against a teleological functionalism that prevailed in England and France” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 18, a. trans.). If this tendency perceives the individual as “something that should achieve a purpose besides itself” (Büchner, 1922, p. 355, a. trans.), Büchner, creating from Spinoza’s ideas his own scientific-philosophical model of pantheistic slant, claimed the opposite (Previsic Mongelli, 2009). In this context, it becomes necessary to differentiate between two different borednesses within the analyzed works: a chronified situation-dependent boredom that has become profound, which still preserves its original nature—the one that activates, despite the discomfort it causes, the awareness of one’s own individuality (first reactive level)—and another one, which, on the contrary, constitutes the profound boredom that has completely lost its original nature. The detailed description of both types of profound boredom—as well as the transition

from one to another— serves as a warning against the generalized denial of human nature and its associated distortion of language, both of which are products of the widespread rationalism and absolutism of the time. Lenz still suffers from the first type, while Woyzeck —object of an induced process of dehumanization— as well as Leonce and Lena —victims of a complete “process of automation” (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020, p. 125, a. trans.)— experience the evolution from the first to the second.

In the first passages of both works, the main characters still suffer from the first type of deep boredom until, towards the end, the second one appears. As it will be shown below, the oversight of one’s own nature in this kind of boredom —which is, in fact, a reflection of humanity’s oversight of its own essence— is directly related to one of the most important issues in Büchner’s work: the question of autonomy in the human being. Besides the adaptive aspect of boredom in its original aspect, the importance of the aforementioned double reactive component of boredom must be emphasized, since it plays a significant role in the literary realm. From the first level, which marks the subject’s awareness of the painful situation, to the next —which gives way to an action whose motivation consists, precisely, in modifying the context that causes discomfort and boredom (Ros Velasco, 2021a)— the psychic trajectories of both the bored character and the bored reader will have varied and evolved; it is precisely the task of this article to examine the projection of this path by applying Ros Velasco’s theoretical framework on the literary level of the selected works written by Georg Büchner. While the passage from the first to the second reactive level takes place without any obstacles in a given situation of state boredom, it is not a possibility when talking about dysfunctional boredom (either chronic boredom, chronified situation-dependent boredom or deep boredom). For example, the one who suffers from deep boredom can only move to action through an extreme reaction (Ros Velasco, 2021b). This fact has significant consequences as far as the present study is concerned since it focuses on the cases of chronified situation-dependent boredom and deep boredom. The unfeasibility of the subject experiencing dysfunctional boredom to move to the second reactive level will reflect, in the cosmos of literature, Büchner’s endeavor to promote “the formation of a new spiritual life among people” (Büchner, 1922, p. 563, a. trans.), even while being aware of “the impossibility of changing the world and human existence” (Hofmann and Kanning, 2013, p. 9, a. trans.). The fact that “the first level of reaction, in which one is aware of the problem and sees oneself prey to it, is reached, regardless of the fact that one cannot make the leap to the second” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 233, a. trans.), makes the chronified situation-dependent boredom and deep boredom experienced by Leonce, Lena, Lenz and Woyzeck an interesting motivator of spiritual unfolding, a driving force of resistance to the stifling conditions in which they find themselves immersed.

3. Analysis

3.1. Büchner’s Position Towards Boredom

It is undeniable that boredom constitutes a central motif in Georg Büchner’s work and thought. Through his epistolary correspondence, his dramas and plays, it becomes clear that boredom shaped his ideas and his way of perceiving and understanding the world (Fortmann, 2012). This is shown, among other things, by the following excerpt from a letter he wrote to Karl Gutzkow: “Its

whole life [the life of the “outdated modern society”] consists only of attempts to banish the most dreadful boredom. It can extinguish – that is the only new thing it can still experience” (Büchner, 1922, p. 563, a. trans.). Indeed, as Ros Velasco (2017) states, nineteenth-century German society was a bored community; it was a “widespread feeling” that was recorded not only by Büchner, but also by other German writers such as Hölderlin, Kleist, Novalis or Heine (Ros Velasco, 2017). Given the adaptive function that boredom possesses (Ros Velasco, 2017), it provides valuable information about the relationship between art and the individual, form and essence, society and individuality, language and scientific development; linkages that precisely help to shed light on Büchner’s worldview about his time, the critical message underlying his works, as well as the poetic genius of a writer who, in the words of Walter Jens (1983), was ahead of his time: “The writer, scientist and politician Büchner is so close to us that the solemn epitaph is suddenly transformed into the laudation of a contemporary” (p. 80, a. trans.). Equally genius was his position on boredom, as the germanist Norbert Otto Eke (2012b) describes it: “Precisely because Büchner ‘accepts’ boredom as a painful experience, his work differs from the compensatory offerings of today’s entertainment industry, which merely conceal the instability of the concepts of the modern subject” (p. 179, a. trans.). The reason Büchner’s position towards boredom is important will be shown below.

3.2. Romanticism and Büchner’s Motif of Boredom

It is of particular relevance for the present study to explain the particular reaction of the German and French Romantics towards a chronified situation-dependent boredom “which was coming to be felt as the deep boredom that makes one doubt the meaning of existence” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 118, a. trans.), given the decisive influence of the movement on Büchner’s work, as “the critical research of the last hundred years” (Beise, 2013, p. 367, a. trans.) demonstrates. Aligned with early Romanticism, Büchner firmly believes in a nature “[which] in all its utterances [is] directly self-sufficient” (1922, p. 356, a. trans.), and, to that extent, he promotes the same “republican discourse” that Schlegel had assigned to poetry years earlier (Beise, 2013, pp. 367–370, a. trans.). The polyphonic character of Büchner’s work is, therefore, a vindication of the unique and unrepeatable essence of each component of nature, which must be inalienable. In the era that saw the birth of “the differentiation between natural and civilized man” (Volgger, 2023, p. 44, a. trans.), Büchner glimpsed the problems arising from an excessive encouragement of the latter. Contrary to British-French functionalism, which considers each individual as a system of natural laws with “a purpose besides itself” (Büchner, 1922, p. 355, a. trans.), Büchner joins an empiricism whose basis is “the philosophical direction”: strongly influenced by Spinoza, he sees in nature a whole that follows a “primordial law”, whose mechanism is obeyed, also, by God (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 19, a. trans.). In this infinite fluid that “is oriented towards [...] [a] pantheistical superior law” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 19, a. trans.), Büchner claims for the human being the awareness of his own dignity: “Nature does not act according to purposes, it does not wear itself out in an infinite series of purposes, one of which conditions the other [...] Everything that exists, exists by itself” (1922, p. 356, a. trans.). Assuming this perspective, the hypothetical man should not succumb the temptation of transforming human nature into an old illusion to be extinguished. However, civilized man —the Anglo-French functionalist— sees only an “infinite series of purposes” and thus perceives his or her existence within an elongated temporal reference system. It is not by chance that this seemingly infinite time constitutes,

according to Ros Velasco (2017, p. 211, a. trans.), the “experimental object” of the German variant of boredom: *die Langeweile*.

If the motif of boredom appears repeatedly in Büchner’s work, it does so precisely in order to question such a conception of time. Perceived eternity is nothing more than a questionable construction insofar as it involves a concept of time that derives from functionalist presuppositions. Therefore, by employing *die Langeweile*, Büchner instills in the reader a continuous sense of estrangement and contradiction towards the world: Leonce’s monologues are artificial; in *Woyzeck*, the displays of the results of “education” in the presence of the crowd, with their humanized animals and animalized humans, are decadent, empty and irrational, and, likewise, the romance between Leonce and Lena is, at its core, a story of their “process of automation” (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020, p. 126, a. trans.). The emergence of the grotesque and the tragicomic, which Büchner picks up from Romanticism (Beise, 2013), highlights, as the motif of boredom does, a profound imbalance between two worlds: between noumenon and phenomenon, between ideal and reality. Through such pronounced contrasts, Büchner seeks to transform his readers into citizens aware not only of their sensual participation as characters in the *theatrum mundi*, but also, and most importantly, of the infinite breadth of their intellect. That is why the motif of chronified situation-dependent boredom —born of the difference between “the excess of expectations” and the environment incapable of satisfying them (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 126, a. trans.)— results here, in the author’s literary production, as a sign of life; the component which constitutes, according to Büchner, the fundamental criterion of every work of art: “The feeling that what has been created has life [...] may be the only criterion in matters of art” (Büchner, 1922, p. 92, a. trans.). Boredom is the evidence that the natural man still wishes to continue existing despite a dehumanizing world that systematically substitutes essence for appearance, meaning for signifier, virtue for domination. Art, in Büchner’s eyes, has to take charge of life; the only feasible method of approach is, therefore, that one carried out by the romantic artist: his or hers is foremost a synesthetic, visual and sonorous path (Beise, 2013). Only the fine conjunction of the senses renders oneself an artist, a true captor of life. Poetically speaking, the preference for romantic synaesthesia “means leaving behind the rules of classicism, grasping the whole ‘creation’ in the ‘moment’, loving ‘each’ individual, if only for her or his ‘humanity’, however ‘ugly’ he or she may be” (Beise, 2013, p. 377, a. trans.). When Büchner brings up the suffering derived from pathological boredom, it means that life, embodied by romantic synesthesia, is at risk; that is why Woyzeck feels overwhelmed in the face of silence: “Quiet, everything quiet, as if the world was dead” (Büchner, 1922, p. 145, a. trans.). By contrast to the final solution proposed by Senancour in *Obermann*, which allows the main character to cope with boredom by being aware of the imminent arrival of death (Ros Velasco, 2022), Büchner deliberately does not come up with a reliable answer or resolution. For him, the point is not to fight against boredom, but to integrate it into the literary cosmos (Eke, 2012b) in order to make the reader aware of the fact that “[the] original illness is society” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 133, a. trans.).

Thus, through the seams of French Romanticism, all the main Büchnerian characters analyzed undergo the evolution theorized by Ros Velasco (2022) from ennui (“the profound boredom, symptom of a particular way of life [...] [and whose] origin is chronified situation-dependent [boredom]”) to spleen (“the physical and mental manifestation of this symptom which, stagnating in time, comes to sicken, literally, the person who suffers from it”) —and the

consequent propagation of this process among the different members of society, until, finally, it becomes the *mal du siècle* (pp. 132–133, a. trans.). That Büchner was familiar with such terms and worldviews is shown by the fact that, when creating *Leonce und Lena*, he drew on the comedy *Fantasio* by Alfred de Musset (Beise, 2013); a writer who, precisely, made famous the expression *mal du siècle* (Ros Velasco, 2022). It is also a romantic legacy of the Büchnerian longing to examine the questionable autonomy of the human being (Beise, 2013), as it will be explained in more detail in the section on *Woyzeck*.

3.3. The Motif of Boredom in *Woyzeck*

If Büchner was, as Walter Jens (1983) claimed, ahead of his time, it was —among other aspects— because of his ability to glimpse, more than fifty years earlier, the birth of a phenomenon that was about to become widespread at the end of the century, as Ros Velasco (2017) explains:

Throughout all these productions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, boredom is presented as a forced experience which constitutes a component of everyday life [...] It gradually becomes an opening process towards the great mental functions and subdues individuals to a regression towards the most primitive psychological states: bestiality, fear, infantilism [...] This transformation was of great interest to the psychology of the time specializing in the problems of attention and disorders of the conscience. The professionals of psychology understood that the cure for boredom was materializing through bestiality and deviancy of all kinds. Thereafter, medicine would be a potion that would shake the stagnant identity and the hospital the jungle in which man would proceed to his slow dehumanization (p. 236, a. trans.).

The conception of the “hospital [as] the jungle in which man would proceed to his slow dehumanization” is, by all means, a perfect characterization of the medical realm that appears depicted as a machine of domination in *Woyzeck*. The bestiality by which he is mistreated —and which, unfortunately, he will unleash on Marie— appears precisely under the signs and circumstances outlined by Ros Velasco. The story is based on the true Johann Christian Woyzeck, accused and executed in 1824 for murdering his lover (Hofmann and Kanning, 2013). The case caused controversy and was the reason for a heated discussion that directed the gaze of public opinion towards a renewed reflection on guilt, mental illness and misery (Hofmann and Kanning, 2013), topics which, nevertheless, go beyond the limits of this study and will therefore not be the subject of exhaustive research. In Büchner’s drama, all the central characters —the doctor, the captain, Woyzeck— are beasts; even the world itself is beastly. The doctor lowers Franz to the condition of an animal: “Beast, should I move your ears, do you want to do it like the cat? So, gentlemen, this is the transition to the donkey” (Büchner, 1922, p. 728, a. trans.). The captain constantly humiliates him and violently treats him: “Hey, you, do you want to be shot, do you want to have a couple of bullets put in your head?” (Büchner, 1922, p. 725, a. trans.). The world is a hopeless place, as it emerges from the grandmother’s tale, filled with “stars [...] [that are] tiny little gold gnats”, based on an “Earth [that] was “an overthrown pot” (Büchner, 1922, p. 713, a. trans.). In this “overthrown pot” Woyzeck —bored because of the unchangeable misery of his situation— is aware of the lack of correspondence between his nature and its suffocation in the external world. He suffers, as a consequence, from a chronified situation-dependent boredom that has eventually developed into a deep boredom, an ennui, which also manifests itself physically and psychologically —the spleen— in the main figure’s weakness and his hallucinations, and which, finally, will evolve into a deep boredom completely stripped of its original adaptive function. However, the drama is not only a story about a very particular kind of reaction to

boredom, but, moreover, anticipating “what would be done in the century to come” (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 236, a. trans.) and following that “awareness [...] towards the rhetoric of science and literature in the Vormärz period” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 26, a. trans.) —a critique against a society which “instead of turning its eyes on the real social and economic agents that had caused that state of generalized and complexified boredom [...] lashes out against emotion itself” (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 236, a. trans.). Hence the fact that, in Büchner’s drama, boredom seems to be unpopular, everyone anxiously flees from it: “It makes me fear for the world when I think of eternity. Keep busy, Woyzeck, keep busy!” (Büchner, 1922, p. 149, a. trans.). This is where Büchner’s aforementioned statement in his letter to Gutzkow acquires a revealing significance, inasmuch as a society unwilling to change in order to put an end to the chronified situation-dependent boredom —created by its own— becomes meaningless.

3.4. Boredom and Human Autonomy in Woyzeck

Büchner questions the autonomy of the individual in a considerable part of his works, from *Danton’s Tod* through *Leonce und Lena* up to *Woyzeck*, among others (Beise, 2013). This problematic already appears in the first productions of Romanticism (see *William Lovell*) but it is in Büchner’s oeuvre where the question acquires renewed importance in the light of a different dimension, not only because he transfers the unknown to the realm of the psychological reality of the character (Beise, 2013), but also because, in works like *Woyzeck*, Büchner takes the “literary and scientific discourse (...) to the limit of its possibilities” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 25, a. trans.). Chronified situation-dependent boredom becomes essential in this regard since it indicates the imbalance between the two realms; it is precisely from such a void or discrepancy that the possibility of free will derives. Insofar as Büchner constructs *Woyzeck* as a literary experiment based on his own medical knowledge, reflections and experience (Previsic Mongelli, 2009), he succeeds in lucidly portraying a borderline case “between the object of the experiment and the autonomous individual” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 25, a. trans.). The doubt between the two worlds is precisely that which “opens up something in the system [...] that could testify of a free will” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 25, a. trans.). The pain that *Woyzeck* feels because of “the comma that separates yes from no” and the suicidal tendencies that seize him (spleen) derive from a chronified situation-dependent boredom rendered profound (ennui), yet this boredom is of special interest insofar as it witnesses the possibility of human autonomy. Moreover, it highlights *Woyzeck*’s desire to know, to gain knowledge: for Spinoza —whose *Ethik* Büchner read and studied in depth (Friedrich, 2020)— to follow the maxim of *sapere aude* constitutes an indispensable mindset to be able to talk about autonomy: “It does not seem that the mere ability to choose makes one any more self-directing. Rather, we must also know what is behind the doors so that our decision may reflect our own commitments, priorities and values” (Kisner, 2011, p. 61).

The fact that Büchner grew up in a scientific environment, was trained as a scientist and pursued a scientific career in the century “which found an ideal partner in science” (Vanpamel, 1999, p. 55) allowed him to experience a boredom that gave him a special, lucid sharpness when it came to understanding the key problems of his time; we know that Büchner was bored thanks to the testimony of his brother Ludwig (Eke, 2012b). The author belonged to that generation of scientists with a poetic soul whose resistance to the incipient positivist thinking was expressed in the most diverse ways, “from desperate, hateful rage to the degradation of the image of God to an

animal and [...] to the resigned acceptance of the total dissolution of personality” (Hof, 1970, p. 61, a. trans.).

The incipient industrialization as well as the development of functionalism, resulted in an expansion of the “hypothetical aspect” of the subject (Hof, 1970, pp. 11, 15, a. trans.). In contrast to the substance-based categorical world of the Middle Ages, modernity introduced a luminous and unlimited source of possibilities and transformations. However, such an outpouring was to clash forcefully with man’s former categorical inclination: “The idea of a vital and historical trajectory that extends to infinity or is circular is unbearable to the categorist [...] He feels an ever-increasing horror before it, which often ends in despair” (Hof, 1970, pp. 59–60, a. trans.). Although the century that experienced the prolific development of science gained for itself “the pure potentiality” —an unprecedented range of forms and possibilities— it is also true that it lost the notion of substance. What had once formed the material of the medieval categorical world was now beginning to be perceived as “a boring borderline example of the potentiality of form” (Hof, 1970, p. 18, a. trans.). The fascinating glow of the new scientific discoveries, which turned the laws of nature into applications on nature itself, transformed the form into the captain of the content, the mathematical gaze into the first and last principle of its object of observation. That is why in *Woyzeck*, the town crier (*Ausrufer*) who presents a horse to the crowd refers to it as “progress[es] of civilization” and claims that “representation prevails” (Büchner, 1922, p. 719, a. trans.). If the abstract law is more important than the nature on which such rule is applied, then it is not strange to see that, in *Woyzeck*, the doctor reproaches his guinea pig for not agreeing to urinate so as to contribute to the results of his experiment (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020), precisely by alleging the paradoxical argument according to which “man is free, in man individuality is transfigured into freedom” (Büchner, 1922, p. 722, a. trans.). The hypothetical world depicted by Büchner finds itself at such an advanced stage that the doctor’s claim is not even direct. At first sight, Woyzeck’s reprehensible behavior seems to derive from the fact that he has “pissed against the wall like a dog”, but, far from it, the real reason for the doctor’s criticism is something else: “Woyzeck, don’t you have to urinate again? Go in there and try [...] I have the contract in my hand” (Büchner, 1922, p. 722, a. trans.). In fact, the doctor masks his reprobation by alluding to the superiority of will over nature: “Nature! Have I not shown that the musculus constrictor vesicae is subordinate to will? Nature!” (Büchner, 1922, p. 722, a. trans.). The truth is that Büchner, as an avid reader of Spinoza, is well aware of the fact that the human being can only know the facts, but not the causes (Beise, 2013). That is why he brings up here the oblivion of substance that has ensued from the mathematical-functional world, whose paradigmatic representative the doctor is. This is reflected in the low esteem and respect that he feels for the human being, as he expresses it in the following fragment: “God forbid that I should get excited because of a human being. A human being! If only it were a salamander” (Büchner, 1922, p. 722, a. trans.). Another proof of the superiority that according to this worldview, natural law possesses over nature is the enthusiasm with which the doctor classifies Franz’s behavior as “the most beautiful aberratio mentalis partialis” when the latter refers cryptically —through the metaphor of mushrooms— to his desire to know himself (Büchner, 1922, p. 723, a. trans.). As if it were a gravitational field, the hypothetical gaze —which dethrones substance, consciously eliminating that “nature” to which Franz alludes— modifies the meaning and significance of language to the point of corrupting it, since it inverts the original meaning of terms (Glück, 1985). That is, in fact,

the underlying reason for the lack of real communication between the characters (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020): the “nature” to which Franz alludes is not the “nature” to which the doctor refers. The captain and the doctor represent the hypothetical world and, as such, both of them use language according to this new worldview, in which abstraction and form take precedence over essence. In this conception, the meaning of a word no longer matters, as the captain bluntly acknowledges: “[the word] is not mine” (Büchner, 1922, p. 150, a. trans.). He, therefore, does not mind using only the signifier of the term “morality”, completely ignoring its meaning insofar as he constitutes “an empty figure” (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020, p. 137, a. trans.). This automatism of the characters may also be a linguistic and moral automatism that relates directly to boredom. In such circumstances, an individual who still preserves categorical residues will begin to feel overwhelmed —and bored— by “the awareness of not really being the master of one’s own actions, but rather the mechanical executor of someone else’s will” (Hof, 1970, p. 64, a. trans.). This is the core of reflection concerning Woyzeck: “Doctor, have you seen the double nature? When the sun is at noon and it feels like the world went up in fire, a terrible voice has already spoken to me!” (Büchner, 1922, p. 153, a. trans.). The “terrible voice” distressing Woyzeck unveils that his deep boredom is approaching closer and closer to total dysfunctionality. Trapped in uneasiness, Franz constantly wonders about this double nature that he perceives everywhere and which, in fact, he only feels within himself. As opposed to boredom in its transient variant (state-boredom), which could help Woyzeck to know himself (Ros Velasco, 2017), the suffocating situation generated by his situation-dependent and chronic boredom converted into deep boredom prevents him from satisfying his desire to know whether he —who is continually treated like an animal— is nevertheless human or whether, on the contrary, lacks free will: “We have nice weather, Mr. Hauptmann. If you see such a beautiful, solid gray sky, you might feel like knocking a block into it and hanging on to it, just because of the dash between yes, and no, yes —and no” (Büchner, 1922, pp. 725–726, a. trans.). The suffering derived from that uncertainty, which “dash between yes, and no”, is so unbearable to him that Woyzeck even thinks of suicide, an extreme response that could put an end to his profound boredom. In this sense, the reigning in communication between the characters, as well as the chronified situation-dependent boredom turned profound experienced by Woyzeck, can be seen as a symptom of the gulf between Franz’s desire to access knowledge, to know himself —he expresses it cryptically: “Have you seen what figures the mushrooms growing on the ground form? Who could read them!”— and the impossibility of seeing one’s innermost self-realized in a suffocating world: “Captain, the earth is hellishly hot” (Büchner, 1922, pp. 723, 725, a. trans.). But it is precisely this discrepancy, this pathological boredom in particular that makes Woyzeck “the only human being in the whole drama” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 24, a. trans.). Following Spinoza, his humanity is proven by his rational disposition (Kisner, 2011); which is, of course, a defining trait of one “who knows the hypothetical character of the world and yet must categorically exist” (Hof, 1970, p. 67, a. trans.) and thus feels deeply bored. At a time of uncertainty and change that was leaving behind the characteristic univocity of the categorical world, “the ambivalent, contemptuously ironic attitude, the attitude of the man who groans in pain behind the laughing mask” (Hof, 1970, p. 66, a. trans.), which is so distinctive of Büchner, was beginning to emerge.

3.5. Lenz: The Profound Boredom of a Poetic Soul

One of the most interesting aspects of the boredom that emerged at the dawn of industrialization is its temporary condition of a leap into the void: it reflects the uncertainty triggered in the individual by the fact of being born in an epoch of change that was yet to be written. Immersed in this transitional experience —the same that has already been mentioned when explaining the effects of science on the evolution of deep boredom established by Ros Velasco (2017), or the rise of the “hypothetical world” theorized by Hof (1970, p. 15, a. trans.)— the poetically minded individual who experiences a chronified situation-dependent boredom knows, more than any other, the state that Zweig calls “demonic”: “I term ‘daemonic’ the unrest that is in us all, driving each of us out of himself into the elemental” (Zweig, 2009, pp. 12–13, a. trans.). This “restless part in every single soul” (Zweig, 2009, p. 13, a. trans.) reflects the imbalance between the world and the soul, just as boredom indicates an imbalance between the environment and the subject experiencing it (Ros Velasco, 2017). Such uneasiness constitutes the reflection of a deep boredom towards an “epoch [which] [is] on the run” (Moritz, 2022, p. 84, a. trans.). In *Lenz*, Büchner portrays time —from Lenz’s point of view— as a parameter that has definitively lost its subjective-individual component in favor of the objective time of universal history (Eke, 2012a). When he is asked to return to society, the writer, afflicted by profound boredom —the origin of which is a chronified situation-dependent boredom, prolonged in time— only wishes to be left in peace, to rest, which is not strange given that his perception of time is stripped of its subjective-individual dimension:

Away here, away: to the house: it’ll be great there: you know I can’t stand it anywhere but around there, in the neighborhood. If I couldn’t sometimes go up a mountain and see the countryside, and then go back down into the house, walk through the garden and look in the window – I’d be great! great! Leave me alone! Just a little peace and quiet now that I’m feeling a little better! Away, away: I don’t understand it, with those two words the world is ruined. Everyone needs something; if he can rest, what more could he have! Always climbing, struggling, and thus throwing away for eternity all that the moment gives, and always starving in order to enjoy once! Thirst, while bright springs leap across one’s path! (Büchner, 1922, p. 94, a. trans.).

It is in his reclusion from the world that Lenz finds a certain level of peace. This fact is interesting: the one who suffers from a chronic situation-dependent or deep type of boredom finds a new apparent calm in reclusion. He does not get rid of his suffering, because the situation, in the end, does not change; but he finds a new provisional form of tranquility by withdrawing from society. The ultimate proof that Lenz suffers from the most pathological/dysfunctional type of boredom lies in his fits of madness and his extreme reactions:

He despaired of himself; then he prostrated himself, he wrung his hands, he stirred everything within him - but dead! dead! Then he pleaded for God to do a sign for him; then he rummaged within himself, fasted, lay dreaming on the ground (Büchner, 1922, p. 99, a. trans.).

Without God’s help and in an almost terminal state of madness (spleen), this is how Lenz finds himself immersed in his deep boredom (ennui).

3.6. The Evolution to a Deep Boredom Stripped “of Its Original Nature” in *Leonce und Lena*

The same vindication of human nature that Büchner carries out in *Woyzeck* is also present in *Leonce und Lena*. Thus, the inheritors of the throne experience the same transition as Franz: they suffer from a profound boredom that gradually strips away its original adaptive nature (Ros

Velasco, 2017). In the beginning, Lena is still able to reflect on human autonomy, questioning her own as she finds herself, in comparison to the flowers, much more prevented from acting freely: “The flowers open and close their calyxes to the morning sun and the evening wind as they please. Is the daughter of a king less than a flower?” (Büchner, 1922, p. 125, a. trans.). Similarly, Leonce is aware of the imbalance between his expectations and the environment around him: “Do you see the old trees, the hedges, the flowers [...] How they [...] fear being so old and yet the world is still so young. O Valerio, and I am so young, and the world is so old” (Büchner, 1922, p. 128, a. trans.).

Their deep boredom will become increasingly pathological. Leonce will not be able to do anything against it, as it will be evidenced by the fact that the extreme reaction that could have put an end to his pain —i.e. his suicide attempt— is thwarted by the intercession of Valerio, who decides to save his life (Büchner, 1922). Leonce himself acknowledges the death of his spirit: “It is a delicious contrast: these heavenly stupider eyes [...] this spiritual death in this spiritless body” (Büchner, 1922, p. 126, a. trans.). Lena’s passivity reveals the same situation since the governess comes to the idea of fleeing: “I have something on my mind. Let’s see. Come!” (Büchner, 1922, p. 125, a. trans.).

If Leonce and Lena fall in love with each other, it is because they share the same suffering —the meaninglessness of their existence as a reflection of their deep boredom— as Ros Velasco (2021b) states: “what cannot be denied is that this boredom unites all those who suffer from it” (p. 111, a. trans.). However, despite the fact that love had managed to kindle in both of them the hope of escaping the instrumentalization to which they had been forced, it will finally drown in an illusion (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020): “I betrayed”, express the two just after getting married and having discovered each other’s true identity (Büchner, 1922, p. 141, a. trans.).

The evolution towards completely dysfunctional deep boredom (Ros Velasco, 2017) is outwardly materialized through the progressive automation of both protagonists (Arévalo Sánchez, 2020), which reaches its peak at the end of the tragicomedy in the wedding scene: “I actually wanted to announce to a high and honored society that the two world-famous automatons have arrived, and that I am perhaps the third and strangest of the two, if I really knew who I am” (Büchner, 1922, p. 138, a. trans.). In his speech, Valerio addresses the indispensable requirement established by Spinoza that makes it possible to speak of a truly human condition. Without knowledge, there is no rationality possible, and therefore, there is no human nature either. In this context, boredom becomes a crucial signal since it arises from an environment that stifles the possibility of finding “the way and the method [...] by means of which we can comprehend the unknown things” (Büchner, 1922, p. 343, a. trans.). The deep boredom that Leonce and Lena suffer by then is so extremely stripped of its original adaptive nature that both of them, as dehumanized subjects —not by chance Valerio tells about them that they are “mere cardboard lids” (Büchner, 1922, p. 139, a. trans.)— are absorbed by the rules and conventions of the court, finally merging into it: “Gentlemen [...] Go home now, but don’t forget your speeches, sermons and verses, because tomorrow we’ll start the fun all over again in peace and comfort” (Büchner, 1922, p. 141, a. trans.). None of them is able to access the first reactive level of boredom anymore.

This is one of the many consequences of a context that Büchner systematically criticizes in his works. Deep boredom as a symptom of an absolutist government that has lost even the

ability to satisfy its own elite constitutes one of the varied criticisms that the young Büchner launches at Restoration Germany, mired in the goal of becoming a state of automaton or, as Novalis would say long before the post-Vienna Congress era, a state that —like no other— “has been run like a factory”, referring above all to the newly born but increasingly powerful Prussia (Safranski, 2020, p. 176, a. trans.). Even though Büchner longed for the practical attainment of the ideals of the French Revolution, he realized that his expectations would be frustrated by the actual circumstances in which he found himself immersed (Hofmann and Kanning, 2013). The correlate of this hopelessness in the socio-political sphere corresponds to the deep or profound type of boredom, in which “a whole group feels jaded in the face of the given” (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 29, a. trans.). Hence, the playwright uses the motif as a critical source of his time: after all, he thus turns it into a mirror reflecting the shortcomings of his time’s social configuration (Hofmann and Kanning, 2013). The tyranny of rigid norms leads the human being to the ruin of his spirit; given the socio-political circumstances of the time, the individual could not develop and express his or her true nature, but had to adapt to a pre-established social configuration.

3.7. The Importance of the First Reactive Component of Boredom in Büchner’s Work

The following words, which Leonce addresses to Valerio at the end of the third scene in the first act —just before they flee to Italy— summarize with forcefulness the anguished drive that almost all Germans share throughout the nineteenth century:

Oh, I know myself, I know what I shall think and dream in a quarter of an hour, what I shall think and dream in eight days, what I shall dream in a year. God, what have I done that you make me, like a schoolboy, recite my lesson so often (Büchner, 2022, p. 52, a. trans.).

The nothingness, that shadow cast by the divine emptiness, reminds the bored ones that in the face of the abyss, they can do nothing but anguish in their deep boredom; the more so if it comes to its absolutely dysfunctional, dehumanized variant. Lena is aware of this condition, and so she describes it when she thinks of Leonce in her room:

He was so old under his blond curls. The spring on his face and the winter in his heart! That is sad. The tired body finds its sleeping pillow everywhere, but when the spirit is tired, where should it rest: a terrible thought occurs to me: I believe there are people who are unhappy, incurable, just because they are (Büchner, 1922, p. 131, a. trans.).

The “unhappy” is actually an incurable sufferer of pathological boredom —the deep type— against which he or she can do nothing but think about the unfortunate situation without ever taking any action that would interrupt his or her pain (Ros Velasco, 2022). However, his/her remaining on the first reactive level explains the meaning of the words uttered by Leonce: with “But Valerio, the ideals!” or “I believe in dreams” Leonce vindicates the value of human nature that develops itself, despite not being able to put it into practice (Büchner, 1922, p. 126, a. trans.).

Leonce and Lena may eventually discover themselves to be the princes whose union their parents had already desired; but by running away and rebelling against the divine imposition of their monarchical responsibilities, they have granted human nature the superior status it is entitled to. For Büchner, aesthetics must meet, through the appearance of form, a content that vindicates the autonomy of the individual. The access of the deeply bored characters to the first reactive level of boredom —in which the vindication of human nature is to be found— opens up a ray of hope for the reader who feels a similar boredom. Although it is impossible to move to action when

suffering from deep boredom, the individual can still remain in the realm of ideas. This field—which corresponds to the first reactive level of boredom—should not be underestimated: in it take shape poetic truth and philosophical speculation so that Grimmelshausen’s “Differentsoon” (“Baldanders”) appears, which is, indeed, the source and basis of a truly human existence (2022, p. 621, a. trans.). In that joint variation—which is precisely what boredom guarantees since it constitutes a “driving force” (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 32, a. trans.)—Büchner finds the foundation of his Spinoza-based model, in which an “infinite being as *natura naturans* creates by itself the *natura naturata*” (Previsic Mongelli, 2009, p. 19, a. trans.): a symphony based on the unity of soul and body, so that each component, even being part of the ensemble, preserves simultaneously its intrinsic nature. Leonce can be trapped in his deep boredom; Lena too, or even the king himself; but the readers of the period to whom the play is addressed—who suffer, in general, from a chronified situation-dependent boredom and/or deep boredom—can take from the tragicomedy at least the awakening and, in some cases, even the final impulse to put an end to the discomfort they feel as a result of the context.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I began by outlining the relationship between the sociocultural conditions of nineteenth-century Germany and the transition from chronified situation-dependent boredom (or situation-dependent and chronic boredom) to the deep type. The aim was to address the existence of both types of boredom as a central motif in a selection of Georg Büchner’s works, as well as the implications and consequences of its use from a literary point of view. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology was followed—Lenz, *Leonce und Lena* and *Woyzeck* were analyzed by applying Ros Velasco’s research on boredom, which resulted in the fact that dysfunctional boredom does appear in each of the aforementioned works. Moreover, it acts as a symptom or warning of a widespread dehumanization that degrades the individual and threatens to strip him or her completely of his or her nature. But what is interesting here is that, as chronified situation-dependent boredom gradually evolves into profound boredom, the latter turns out to be mutating: deep boredom reaches its most dysfunctional variant. This is to be found in *Woyzeck*, *Lena* and *Leonce*, as the former—suffering an awful degrading “medical” treatment—ends up degraded to the condition of an animal, while the latter two resignedly accept their ultimate role of automatons (Musolf, 1986, p. 225). Under these circumstances, boredom loses its original transformative potential that once prevented a dangerous human “overadaptation” to the environment (Ros Velasco, 2017, p. 137, a. trans.), leading to the inevitable death of the spirit already mentioned.

Such is the mood at a time of transition that Hof (1970) places “between *Sturm und Drang* and *die Moderne*” (p. 66, a. trans.), permeated by the new worldview that brought with it the hypothetical subject, described in scientific terms using the incipient rise of British-French functionalism, opposed to Büchner’s way of thinking and feeling (Previsic Mongelli, 2006). In fact, the scientist and revolutionary writer made use of the motifs and formalities of Romanticism to vindicate his position: from the ennui-spleen combo propagated among the population in the form of *mal du siècle* (Ros Velasco, 2022) to the Schlegelian characterization of poetry as “republican speech [...] which is its own law and its own purpose, where all parts are free citizens, and are allowed to have a vote” (Schlegel, 1797, p. 150, a. trans.), all these forms aim to promote

in the individual the awareness of his or her inalienable right to preserve and develop his or her own nature fruitfully.

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