

## Le Journal de Charles Swan

Georg Büchner is the author of four works of literature; the chef d'œuvre of the quatrains (*Woyzeck*) is an unfinished work published posthumously in 1879.

*Woyzeck* has the distinction of being the first work in German whose protagonist is a member of the working class. But you already know all of that. You are curious as to Aporia Theater's production. This incarnation of the modern drama is foremost notable for its brilliant staging.

Sarah Elizabeth Wansley served as director and translator, and because of the fragmentary draft of the manuscripts, necessarily as editor. She makes the bold decision of having the play begin with the titular hero (Grant Harrison as Woyzeck) murdering his wife Marie (Eloïse Eonnet) and the play bookends with déjà vu of the poor man thrusting a knife into Marie as she repeatedly buckles. The murder is highly choreographed. The choice to stylize is marked in this adaptation and effectively conveys the sense of alienation Woyzeck experiences, and channels *our* disillusionment with modern life— all with a spare but versatile set (a credit to Liz Blessing). Ms. Wansley telegraphs the drudgery of existence much the way Lang did; it is not difficult to believe that she will pursue a similarly illustrious career as a director of theatre. Unlike *Metropolis*, here all is underground.

Woyzeck is a poor (in every sense of the word) soldier who also volunteers as a test subject. The unnamed doctor who pokes at him with as much care as a child has for his toys: playing with them, breaking them to observe the pieces, much as his captain (a wonderful Ugo Chukwu) condescend to him. One is moral condescension; the other is intellectual. Our soldier doesn't mind the prods of the physician or the homilies of his superior so long as he can bring home a few extra pieces for his wife, Marie, and infant. Ms. Eonnet as Marie is vibrant, flirtatious, and effervescent as a young blanc de blanc, and equally appealing. Her dalliance with the drum major (Miles Jacoby) with "a chest like a bull, a beard like a lion" sends her husband into a fit; he is already mad to begin with, and not just because of his strict diet peas and nothing but peas.

The production has a strong supporting cast with each member of the ensemble expertly positioned and used by Ms. Wansley, and had it not been for Mr. Harrison as Woyzeck, the play would have an unqualified success. Despite the impeccable direction, she cannot raise her lead from unconvincing tics and a flat demeanor. *Woyzeck* depends upon its lead, not as much as *Lear* falls short or lives

## Le Journal de Charles Swan

strong on its king, or *Hamlet* lives or dies after its prince (disregarding the open graves at the climax of each) but it not a full piece if we are able our eyes away from Mr. Harrison; our eyes should be fixed.

The company, Aporia Theater, was founded by a handful of Columbia students, and occasionally a whiff of the collegiate or the amateur overwhelms the professionalism, but this is to be expected with such a youthful company. Its artistic director and the director of this play, Ms. Wansley, is sadly defecting the city for the West Coast to pursue an MFA in directing at UCSD. Aporia will of course survive her absence, but this production is a promise of further work. Those of us who love the Theatre can only hope she will not turn turncoat and pursue a career in Hollywood.

-CAG