



Lichtenberg: A Cross Section

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Lichtenberg *A Cross Section*

Walter Benjamin

Cast:

I. Moon beings:

LABU, president of the moon committee for earth research

QUIKKO, director of technical equipment

SOFANTI

PEKA

(Voices of moon beings come with a slight echo, like from a cellar.)

II. Human beings:

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG

LORD CHAMBERLAIN OF THE ENGLISH KING

THE ACTOR DAVID GARRICK

MARIA DOROTHEA STECHARDT, *Lichtenberg's girlfriend*

EBERHARD, *servant at Justice Pütter's*

JUSTICE PÜTTER

A TOWN CRIER

A SILHOUETTE SELLER

1ST, 2ND & 3RD CITIZEN OF GÖTTINGEN

A PASTOR

ANNOUNCER: I, as the announcer, see myself in the pleasant condition of taking a position above all parties—I meant to say planets. Since the following events take place between the earth and the moon—or rather either on the former or on the latter—I would be breaking the rules of interplanetary behavior if I, as the announcer, were to take the position

of either the earth or the moon. To remain correct, I will let you know that the earth appears to the moon, which knows all about the other, as mysterious as the moon to the earth, which knows nothing about the other. That the moon knows everything about the earth and the earth nothing about the moon you may deduct from the single circumstance that there is a committee for earth research on the moon. You will have no difficulty following the meetings of this committee. Just to assist you with your orientation, let me point out the following: the debates of the moon committee are extremely short; the allotted speaking time on the moon is the shortest anywhere. The moon inhabitants live on no other substance than the silence of their fellow citizens, which they hence do not like to see interrupted. It is also worth mentioning that an earth year amounts to only a few moon minutes. We are dealing here with the phenomenon of time warp, with which you are undoubtedly familiar. The fact that, on the moon, photographs have always been taken is hardly worth mentioning. The technical equipment of the Society for Earth Research is limited to three units, which can be operated more easily than a coffee mill. First, we have a spectrophone, through which everything that happens on earth can be seen and heard; a parlamonium, which can translate tedious human speech into music for moon citizens spoiled by celestial harmony; and an oneiroscope, with which the dreams of the earthlings can be observed. This is important because of the interest in psychoanalysis prevalent on the moon. You will now join a meeting of the moon committee.

(Gong.)

LABU: I hereby open the 214th meeting of the moon committee for earth research. I welcome all commissioners present, Messrs. Sofanti, Quikko, and Peka. We are approaching the end of our research. After the earth had been examined in all essential matters, we decided—following many requests of moon laymen—to add a few short experiments concerning humans. Certainly, the commission has realized from the beginning that the subject matter is comparatively unproductive. The random samples of the last few millennia have not shown a single case in which a human being has amounted to anything. By stating this as a scientific fact, our sessions only serve to prove the assumption that it is caused by the unfortunate human condition. What, in fact, is the cause of this misfortune gives way to many opinions. Mr. Peka would like to address the meeting.

PEKA: I would like to address the rules of procedure.

LABU: The rules of procedure.

PEKA: Before we enter into further discussions on the agenda, I would like

to propose for everybody to acknowledge this moon map, which has just been published according to the research of Professors Tobias Mayer and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg in Göttingen.

QUIKKO: It is my opinion that the moon committee for earth research should bear no hopes for this moon map. I see that not even the great crater C.Y. 2802, where we hold our meetings, is on the map.

LABU: The moon map will be sent to the archives without discussion.

SOFANTI: Who is Tobias Mayer, please?

LABU: According to the earth archives, Tobias Mayer is a professor of astronomy in Göttingen, who passed away a couple of years ago. Mr. Lichtenberg finished his research.

SOFANTI: I propose to reward Mr. Lichtenberg for his interest in moon research by making him the subject of our research committee, the final meetings of which are dedicated to the humans, as our president just mentioned quite correctly.

LABU: Anyone opposed? No one opposed, the committee accepts the proposal.

QUIKKO: I am in the fortunate position of being able to present a photograph of Lichtenberg.

ALL: Please let us see it.

PEKA: But there are 20 people in the picture.

QUIKKO: This is Pastor Lichtenberg from Oberamstädt near Darmstadt with his wife and his 18 children. The youngest is the moon researcher we mentioned.

SOFANTI: But he's supposed to be over 30.

LABU: Gentlemen, the time for the committee debate is up. I leave it to Mr. Quikko to adjust the spectrophone to Göttingen.

QUIKKO: Spectrophone on Göttingen.

(A series of buzzes and rings can be heard.)

QUIKKO: He's not in Göttingen.

LABU: Then you have to look for him, but quietly. We are now having our hour of silence. *(Pause.)*

QUIKKO: *(Whispering.)* London, he's in London, in the Drury Lane Theatre. They are giving *Hamlet*. The great actor David Garrick is Hamlet.

GARRICK: Rest, rest, perturbed spirit. So gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you;
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do t'express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together.

And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
that ever I was born to set it right.
Nay come, let's go together.

(Storm of applause; then music.)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: During the interval, dear professor, it gets quite noisy here. And His Majesty asked me to give Mr. Garrick the privilege of making the acquaintance of one of the greatest minds in Europe.

LICHTENBERG: Your politeness, Lord Chamberlain, is going too far. His Majesty knows very well that he is granting me a dear wish by enabling me to make Garrick's acquaintance. His acting is beyond all measures, that much I can see.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: His manners, as you will see, are not lesser than his acting craft. He is as much at home at the golden court of St. James as at the paper court of Hamlet.

LICHTENBERG: Will you kindly lead me to his box?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: We will be there shortly. — Announce us to Mr. Garrick.

LICHTENBERG: I was told the acoustics were bad but I understood every word.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: The acoustics are really bad. But when Garrick speaks, no sound is lost. Everyone is dead silent and the audience sits like it was painted on the wall.

BOX OPENER: Mr. Garrick will see you now.

GARRICK: I am happy to welcome you. The king already let me know about your visit.

LICHTENBERG: Too much am I under the impression of your acting to greet you like I intended.

GARRICK: The honor of seeing you before me is more than any greeting could be.

LICHTENBERG: Some of my friends warned me about seeing you. They feared I would lose all sense for the German stage after my return.

GARRICK: What you are saying I do not take seriously; or do you think that the reputation of an Iffland or an Eckhof has not reached us here?

LICHTENBERG: Just that they rarely have the opportunity of acting Lear or Hamlet. Here, Shakespeare is not famous but sacred. His name becomes one with the honorable ideas, one sings through him and of him, and that is why a great part of the English youth knows him sooner than their ABC's.

GARRICK: Shakespeare is our "High Art" but I must not forget what I learned from my friends Sterne and Fielding.

LICHTENBERG: I believe I could fill many pages with what I learned from your behavior with the ghost.

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: Then you won't forget an anecdote I was told about Mr. Garrick lately. A few weeks ago, a visitor was seen in the gallery who believed that the ghost in Act I was real. His neighbor said it was an actor. "But," the former replied, "if that is so, why was the man in black dress frightened of him, too?" The man in black dress, that was Garrick.

LICHTENBERG: Well, yes, you see, the black dress! That's what I wanted to talk about. I have heard you criticize it occasionally, but never between the acts or on your way home or afterwards at dinner, but always after the impression had faded, in cold conversation. And this criticism never made sense to me.

GARRICK: Well, I admit that I have reasons to dress like that. It seems to me as if the old costumes on stage would soon become a masquerade. They may be beautiful when they please, but rarely can the irritation that comes into play be leveled by the pleasure of their beauty.

LICHTENBERG: You feel about actors in old garb like I feel about German books in Latin letters. For me they are always a kind of translation.

GARRICK: Just let me talk about my fight with Laertes in the last act. My predecessors were wearing a helmet, I am wearing the hat. Why? The fall of a hat during a fight I can feel completely, that of a helmet far less. I don't know how tightly a helmet must and can fit; but I feel any movement of a hat. I think you understand me.

LICHTENBERG: Excellently. It is not the actor's business to stir the antique spirit in the audience.

GARRICK: I read once in an old Spaniard that the theatre is like a map. Valladolid is just a finger's breadth from Toledo. You have just seen a man who is 16 years old—and back he is again at 60! That is real theatre, which should not be burdened with pedantry. (*Gong.*) Excuse me, my entrance.

QUIKKO: I hope the gentlemen of the committee will not think it arbitrary that I switched it off. But I believe our material is complete. I am convinced that we can close our discussions without further ado. Professor Lichtenberg's misfortune can no longer be a mystery to us. You saw him in the most brilliant company at the moment of his life when the world seemed to open up for him. He was a magnificent guest at the English court; he had the privilege to speak with the great actor Garrick about the secrets of his art; he visited England's great observatories and made the acquaintance of the rich nobility in their castles and at the seaside resorts; the Queen opened her private gallery to him and Lord Calmshome his wine cellar. And now he is supposed to go back to Göttingen to his tiny tenement,

which his publisher assigned to him as a compensation for his writing. He is supposed to go back to his window, like before, as a substitute for his box seat in the theatre. He has to struggle with the students who were sent to board with him by well-to-do Englishmen. He, who makes calculations about moon eclipses and planet constellations, must also balance the allowance of the young lords and idlers boarding with him. Don't you see that the misery of this existence with all the university intrigue, faculty gossip, envy, and confinement will have to make him a bitter misanthrope before his time? His misfortune? Do you really have to look for it? It's name is Göttingen, in the kingdom of Hanover.

LABU: I believe I am speaking for all citizens of the moon and in particular for our Research Committee for Earth Science when I thank our colleague and technical director most cordially for his interesting elaborations. These have been very illuminating remarks, which are particularly beautiful because they stayed within the limits of our brief speaking time. But I would like to oppose the suggestion to terminate our research at this point. For why should the professor, even if caught in the confinements of his small university town, not rise high above it on the wings of a dream?

SOFANTI: It turns out that the attempt to adjust the spectrophone to Göttingen has revealed that it is nighttime there. We cannot find out anything.

LABU: This seems a welcome opportunity to prove the correctness of my suspicion by employing the oneiroscope. Please give the corresponding orders to central.

(A series of buzzes and rings can be heard.)

LABU: Might I ask you, Mr. Quikko, to assume position at the oneiroscope and to tell us what you are receiving there.

QUIKKO: I see how Professor Georg Christoph Lichtenberg sees himself in his dream. Hovering far above the earth opposite a transfigured old man, whose image fills him with something much higher than simple respect. When he opens his eyes to see him, an irresistible feeling of repose and confidence is flowing through him, and just when he is about to bow before him, the old man addresses him: "You love investigations about nature," he says, "now take a look at something that can be useful for you." And he hands him a sphere, bluish green and grey here and there, which he holds between his forefinger and thumb. Its diameter is no more than a few centimeters. "Take this mineral," continues the old man, "examine it and tell me what you found." Lichtenberg turns over and sees a beautiful hall with tools of all kinds. But I can't describe them to you. Now he examines and touches the sphere; he shakes it and listens to it; he raises it to his tongue; he tries it against steel, glass, and a magnet, also determines

its specific weight. But all these examinations only show him that it is worth very little. He remembers that, in his childhood, he bought three spheres of the same kind, or at least not very different ones, for a penny at the Frankfurt fair. He finds some clay, about the same amount of quicklime, a lot of silica, and also iron and some salt. He is meticulous during his examination, since now that he adds up everything, he finds that the sum is one hundred. But now the old man comes to him, glances at the paper and reads it with a soft smile that is hardly noticeable.

(The following must be read in such a way that in Quikko's voice the two speakers—God and Lichtenberg—are clearly separated.)

“Do you know, mortal one, what it was you were examining there?”

“No, immortal one, I don't know.”

“Know then that it was nothing less than the whole earth in small scale.”

“The earth?—Eternal Great God! And the oceans with all their inhabitants, where are they?”

“They're hanging there from your napkin, you wiped them off.”

“Oh, and the oceans of air and all the splendor of the land!”

“The oceans of air . . . they might be stuck there in the cup with distilled water. And how about your splendor of the land? How can you ask like that? That's dust; there's some at your sleeve.”

“But I didn't find traces of silver and gold which make the world turn!”

“Bad enough. I see I must help you. Know this: with your fiery steel you smashed all of Switzerland and Savoy and the most beautiful part of Sicily. And you completely ruined and uprooted some thousand square miles of Africa. And there, on that glass—they just fell down there—there were the Cordilleras; and what jumped in your eye when you were cutting glass was the Chimborasso.”

I regret to say that the picture is getting out of focus here. The dream seems to be nearing its end. Morning must be dawning in Göttingen.

(A series of buzzes and rings can be heard.)

SOFANTI: At last! The Professor's scientific chamber.

DOROTHEA: *(Opens a door.)* Oh, how stale the air is in here! And the shutters are still closed. *(One can hear the shutters being opened.)* Ah, beautiful air, a beautiful morning! But this dust! He made himself comfortable here while I went home for a week. And even the dust cloth is trying to hide from me. *(Short pause.)* But let's be cheery now! *(She sings.)*

All rise, dear children, children mine!
The morning star with brightest shine
is showing like a hero free
and for the whole wide world to see.

Welcome to you, my dearest day!
With you the night likes not to stay
Bring joy to all our hearts and glee
with your light bright and heavenly.

(One can hear the sound of shattering glass.)

For heaven's sake! *(Again, more outraged.)* For heaven's sake!

LICHTENBERG: *(One hears how he opens the door.)* What happened? Impossible! The electrification machine!

DOROTHEA: *(One can hear the crying.)*

LICHTENBERG: Yes, well, that's my just punishment for sleeping late. Like my most honored teacher Tobias Mayer used to say: "Life consists of the morning hours." And that's why I live by the rule that the rising sun shall never find me in bed as long as I am healthy.

DOROTHEA: *(One can hear her crying.)*

LICHTENBERG: Well, we can't help writing to Braunschweig now to buy a new cylinder for two Louisdor, and for the next few weeks we have to do without artificial lightning.—Well, but what's all this crying about? You're not crying about the damage?—I know you're crying about your toy box. But what could happen to it . . . ? I really wish you had different toys. You ought to have visited Mr. Cox's museum in London with me. One couldn't help moving around through all those magic machines on tiptoe. You could have found serpents there, climbing up the trees; butterflies, moving their diamond-studded wings; tulips opening and closing; waterfalls flowing from twisted glass tubes whirling around their axis; golden elephants with golden palaces on their backs; pigs swimming away on mirrors; crocodiles eating golden spheres.

DOROTHEA: Will you go to London with me one of these days?

LICHTENBERG: London! I'm getting all choked up when I think of London and of Armstale, Smeeth, and Boothwell, those fops, who are sitting in my lectures, stealing my time by visiting me at home—how did they deserve to live in London! And still it remains the nation that brought forth the greatest, most active people. Not the great writers and learned men, but the steadfast, the most generous and courageous, the most dexterous. Nowhere is a human being more honored than in England, and they enjoy everything with body and soul; something we and our soldier governments

can only dream of. Dream! I just remembered that I wanted to tell you about a dream I had today. But you must keep it to yourself. It would not aid my reputation if it were known that a natural scientist dreams. I think that doubts which I would not admit to during the day break free in dreams. And then, in the morning, in my memory, I don't mind seeing them at all. Humans are worthy of doubts. In short, I dreamed in outer space, far away from the earth, near the moon—

DOROTHEA: There's Eberhard with a letter.

LICHTENBERG: It's about time he's coming back, because there's a thunderstorm brewing. (*A knock.*)

LICHTENBERG: Come in!

EBERHARD: Good morning, professor. The Justice sends me, the Justice has received a letter from Gotha for the professor.

LICHTENBERG: I thank you. My reverence to the Honorable Justice.

EBERHARD: Good morning.

LICHTENBERG: Just leave it there, I don't feel like opening it.

DOROTHEA: Why don't you want to open it?

LICHTENBERG: I have an apprehension.

DOROTHEA: What?

LICHTENBERG: An unpleasant feeling's what I've got.

DOROTHEA: Yes, but why?

LICHTENBERG: It's my superstition once again. I get a premonition from every little thing, and a hundred little things become an oracle. I don't need to describe it to you. Each creeping of an insect serves as an answer to questions about my fate. Isn't that odd for a professor of physics? (*Pause.*) Maybe odd, but maybe not at all. I know, too, that the world turns, but I'm still not ashamed to believe it's standing still.

DOROTHEA: But what could be in the letter?

LICHTENBERG: I don't know that, but when I heard the glass shattering, it seemed like bad news right away.

DOROTHEA: You must allow me to open it.

LICHTENBERG: That wouldn't do me any good because you can't read the gentlemen's writing.

DOROTHEA: Gentlemen? What gentlemen?

LICHTENBERG: It's probably the gentlemen of the life insurance.

DOROTHEA: What's that, a life insurance?

LICHTENBERG: A company; they would pay you something when I die.

DOROTHEA: I don't like to hear you talk like that.

LICHTENBERG: (*One can hear him opening a letter.*) My premonitions are reliable. At least this time they were. The gentlemen write: "Dear most honored Professor! In reply to your letter of the 24th of this month we

regret to inform you, upon recommendation of our medical appraiser, who obtained the certificates and documents sent in by you, that we are not able to issue a life insurance policy to you.” That will certainly nurture my whims.

DOROTHEA: So what does the letter mean?

LICHTENBERG: Much worse than the letter are the thoughts it brings up in me. Hypochondriacal, if you know what that is.

DOROTHEA: How should I know that?

LICHTENBERG: Hypochondria, that is the fear of going blind, the fear of going mad, the fear of dying, the fear of dreaming, and the fear of awakening. And once you're awake, watching whether the first crow shoots to the right or left past the steeple.

DOROTHEA: I did not think this morning would be like this.

LICHTENBERG: It's a pretty nice morning, hot and humid no less. And when I look out of the window, I cannot make sense anymore of the fancies of the night. Imagine: yesterday I was daydreaming that man seemed to me like a multiplying table, and later I woke up from my own voice: “It must cool so exquisitely,” I heard myself say, and I was thinking of the phrase of the contradiction that I saw before me, edible . . .

DOROTHEA: Don't you want to close the window? A wind's coming up.

LICHTENBERG: And a strong one it is. We'll have a thunderstorm soon. Anyway, we don't have to mourn our cylinder anymore, because in a few minutes we'll get the most beautiful lightning sent to us in our chamber.

DOROTHEA: Is the lightning rod ready yet?

LICHTENBERG: Yes, since noon yesterday this house has the first German lightning rod, and now the Lord will put it to use very soon.

(Thunder.)

QUIKKO: We now have a thunderstorm in Göttingen, which unfortunately necessitates us to switch off.

SOFANTI: Maybe I could use the break to report the observations, which I made the subject of our discussion.

LABU: Mr. Sofanti has the floor.

SOFANTI: Unfortunately, I am not able to join the elaborations of our dear Mr. Quikko concerning the German philosopher Lichtenberg. Because everybody who followed this conversation with his girlfriend intently must clearly admit that it is not the outer circumstances which spoil this man's life but his temperament. Yes, gentlemen, I do not hesitate to call the poor professor a sick man. Please envision this: a professor of physical science, a man who is used to combine the world's phenomena according to cause

and effect and who builds his life's happiness on insects and crows, dreams and premonitions. This man could be in London or Paris, in Constantinople or Lisbon—the most vivid of lives and the most sophisticated of courts would be lost for him; he would always sit there huddled over like a night owl. Such a man surely can't amount to anything. Do we need a proof for that? Gentlemen, I am delivering the evidence to the academy. Photographs of the Göttingen pocket calendar, which we obtained courtesy of a clever operator on Neptune. Peruse the contributions from the pen of Mr. Lichtenberg, if you would. Are those subjects worthy of a learned man? Observations about the preparation of ice cream in India and about English fashions, about first names and about samples of odd appetites, about the usefulness of cane beatings according to various peoples, about bells and about the aptitude of animals, about carnival customs and about menus, wedding—

LABU: It displeases me to alert our honorable member, Mr. Sofanti, to the fact that he is not only about to exceed his speaking time, due to understandable excitement, but also, because of the well-known phenomenon of time warp, that we have lost contact with our subject, Mr. Lichtenberg, for the duration of one year. We will try to adjust the spectrophone back to Göttingen soon.

(A series of buzzes and rings can be heard.)

QUIKKO: The professor is not dwelling in the laboratory but in the study of his flat in the house of his publisher, Mr. Dietrich. We were able to determine from our archive's files that Mr. Dietrich lets Professor Lichtenberg live at his house for free, so that he, in turn, writes his Göttingen pocket calendar for him. Mr. Lichtenberg is sitting at his desk now. We are having a precision tuning to follow his hand holding the quill. The candle is to the right of the writer, the lighting conditions are quite favorable.—

My dearest friend,

That's what I really call German friendship, dearest man. A thousand thanks for your memento to me. I have not answered you immediately, and heaven knows how things have been with me! You are, and must be, the first to whom I confess. Last summer, soon after your last letter, I suffered the greatest loss of my life. What I am telling you, no one must ever know. In 1777, I met a girl, the daughter of a bourgeois from this town. She was a little over 13 at the time. Such a picture of beauty and gentleness I had never before seen in my life, even though I had seen much. The first time I saw her she was in the company of 5 or 6 others, who, like all children here, were sitting on the city walls selling flowers to

the passers-by. She offered me a bouquet, which I bought. I had three Englishmen with me who were eating and living with me. "How delightful she is," one of them said. I had also noticed that, and, since I knew what a Sodom our town was, I seriously considered taking this exquisite girl away from such dealings. Finally, I talked to her alone and asked her to visit me at home. She would not go with a man to his room, she said. But when she heard I was a professor, she came to me with her mother one afternoon. In a word, she gave up selling flowers and stayed with me all day. Here I found that in this exquisite body there lived a soul just like the one I was always looking for but could never find. I taught her writing and arithmetic and other knowledge that developed her intellect more and more without turning her into a blue stocking. My scientific apparatus, which had cost me over 1500 Taler, first attracted her with its shine, but finally its usage became her single entertainment. Now our acquaintance had grown to the highest level. She left late and came back at daybreak, and all day she took care that my things from tie to air pump were in order. And all this with such heavenly gentleness I never thought possible before. The result was what you have suspected by now—that she stayed with me entirely from Easter 1789 on. Her inclination to this way of living was so intense that she didn't even come downstairs unless she went to church. She could not be torn away from it. We were always together. When she was at church, I felt like I had sent away my eyes and all my senses. In the meantime, I could not look at this angel, with whom I had entered such a relationship, without being greatly moved. That she gave up everything for me was unbearable for me. So, I had her join me at the table when friends were dining with me and gave her the dress that her situation required and loved her more each day. It was my serious intention to join with her before the eyes of the world as well. Oh dear God! And this heavenly girl dies on August 4th, 1782, at sunset. I had the best physicians. Everything in the world had been done. Please consider this, dearest man, and allow me to close here. It is impossible for me to continue.

G.C. Lichtenberg.

LABU: Gentlemen, unfortunately we had to witness again which deplorable troubles are evoked on the planets by death—an interesting phenomenon in and of itself, which is, as you are well aware, unknown here. I believe to act on your behalf as well by sending some music along with the soul of the deceased little flower girl on its way into space.

(A very short music follows.)

LABU: I regret to state that the spectrophone has moved to such an extent that we might have difficulties getting Mr. Lichtenberg back in focus.

(A series of buzzes and rings can be heard.)

QUIKKO: Indeed, there has been a readjustment of one billionth of a milligrade. We no longer have Göttingen. According to my instruments, this must be Einbeck, which is close by.—Quite!

LICHTENBERG: Professor, I believe—

QUIKKO: Quite! Listen to Lichtenberg's voice. It's coming from Einbeck.

LICHTENBERG: Professor, let us retreat into the pub; the noise is about to become a nuisance.

PÜTTER: Here comes the whole mob running after the town crier.

TOWN CRIER: The citizens of Einbeck may know upon decree of the Honorable Magistrate of this town that the reckless, unworthy, and learned murder accomplice Heinrich Julius Rütgerodt is to be sent from life to death, today, June 30th, in the afternoon at 3 o'clock outside the town on the hill. Said Heinrich Julius Rütgerodt was a respected citizen of our town Einbeck who had 1500 Taler in excess of his food, but who nevertheless murdered his mother because she ate too much of his food, as he said. For this purpose, he invented a machine, which, according to excellent professors and university mechanics, is a great tribute to the human mind. He adjoined a certain number of planks in his barn in such a way that, as soon as the plank that his mother was supposed to step on was put in motion, all others would collapse over her head. He also fulfilled his purpose without using nails or causing any other wounds. He beat his wife to death because, one morning, she didn't make the coffee right. He was not able to give another cause during his investigation. He beat his maid dead in the cellar, because he no longer wanted to feed her little child. All professors and officers of justice agree that, apart from his tendency toward inhumane actions, he must have been tortured for hours by his conscience. He could never bear daylight, but sat behind closed shutters all day. Incidentally, he was certified of being healthy and having full command of his senses, indeed being one of the most intelligent people around. This monster in human form will now be sent from life to death, whereby he will once more, with all the people present, listen to all crimes he committed and give a confession for everybody to hear.

PÜTTER: I can't quite forgive myself, dear Mr. Lichtenberg, for having persuaded you to take this trip where your ears are subjected to such plebeian clamor.

LICHTENBERG: I could have had the innkeeper close the windows, had I

not had a certain interest for such criminal cases myself, Justice.

PÜTTER: You may say what you like, but I still know that only your friendship has swayed you to such a doubtful adventure as this execution—as all executions, in fact.

LICHTENBERG: I suppose we won't actually be present at the time. As far as I'm concerned, I would have to—

PÜTTER: No, what do you think? Like I said, all that I am concerned with is laying my hand on the files immediately after the delinquent is executed.

LICHTENBERG: I don't suppose you are working for a Pitaval of our kingdom Hanover?

PÜTTER: I cannot deny it, dear Professor.

LICHTENBERG: Well, maybe you permit me to tell you about a little play I saw years ago in a London puppet theatre.

(Loud voices are heard from outside.)

PÜTTER: Please allow me to close the window. The noise is beginning to get quite loud.

LICHTENBERG: Well, it was a puppet player who had erected his tent outside, near Covent Garden. For a few pence you could sit there for hours. But among the pieces of his repertoire one has remained unforgettable. It was, like I said, a puppet theatre. But if, normally, the puppets represented people, in this play they represented really only what they were: puppets. Five, six, seven of those puppets were hanging in front of a curtain: a merchant, a soldier, a clergyman, a housewife, a judge. They were rocking about in the wind, making conversation. And about what? You won't believe it: about the freedom of the will. It was a peaceful conversation, because there was really only one opinion among all: reason, nature, and religion combined their weight for the benefit of one free will. Only one puppet hanging a little further aside than the others—I think I forgot to mention it—was undecided. I believe this puppet was a philosopher, maybe a professor of physics. But the others paid no mind to his opinion. Suddenly, there appeared a cardboard hand from above.—But that was supposed to be a human hand.—It took away the puppets, one by one. It was very clear. The puppet player took his puppets from the rack. When one after the other was lifted up like that, the others were asked why they were leaving. And each one had an excuse. Only the hand of the puppet player was not mentioned. And finally the philosopher or professor of physics was left alone on stage.

PÜTTER: I don't know what you mean to say by that, dear colleague.

LICHTENBERG: Nothing, I would just like to ask something. Whether we,

when we have a murderer drawn and quartered, make the same mistake as a child who beats the chair he ran into.

PEDLAR: Excuse me, gentlemen, for disturbing you. Please have a look at my collection, gentlemen. The best assorted collection of silhouettes you can find. One silver groschen apiece. The King of Hanover, the King of Prussia, Messrs. Danton and Robespierre, who are so much talked about, and Mr. von Goethe, Ministerial Counsellor, author of "Werther," Mr. Bürger from Göttingen nearby, the great world traveler Mr. Forster, Messrs. Iffland and Kopf, the pride of the Berlin theatre, Demoiselle Schröder from Weimar—I can't name them all for you. No interest! (*Pause.*) Well, then maybe the gentlemen won't refuse a little memento of this day. I present to you the silhouette of our fiend. Please note the text by Mr. Lavater on the back.

PÜTTER: (*Reads.*) An incessant murderer, full of quiet, deep digging malice, a woman murderer, a mother murderer, a miser like no moralist ever imagined, no actor ever acted, no poet ever created. He thrived in the shadow of the night, turned noon to midnight by closing his shutters, locked his house, shy of light, shy of people, he dug into the earth, into deep cellar walls, floors, and fields all of his stolen treasures. Splashed with the blood of innocence, he danced laughing on the wedding day of his wife, whom he later beat to death at the grave she had unknowingly prepared for herself in his presence. All this can be read in the picture: his eyes look at nothing, his laugh resembles an open grave, his terrifying teeth are the gates of hell.

PÜTTER: I think the leaflet is worth a silver groschen to me.

LICHTENBERG: Even two, because it has a little story.

PÜTTER: What do you mean by that?

LICHTENBERG: I wouldn't object to let you in on a little story. I took the liberty of playing a prank, but the matter should remain confidential.

PÜTTER: Confidentiality is part of my profession.

LICHTENBERG: I know. Still, I would not dare letting you in on it, if I didn't know that our opinions on Lavater's physiognomy, which is being taught everywhere now, are the same.

PÜTTER: What makes me wonder about Lavater is that he, who used to be so intent on the signs from which the character could be deducted, could not notice that people who write like him are not believed at all. However, we should know that the way in which testimony is given can be more important sometimes than the testimony itself.

LICHTENBERG: Well, then listen. Circumstances I do not want to touch on enabled me to send the silhouette of the fiend, who is about to be done in out there, to Lavater without him knowing neither who it represented

nor that I had sent it. And now listen to his reply, I am carrying it with me. Such a leaflet is worth more than a kingdom.

PÜTTER: Let me hear it.

LICHTENBERG: This profile certainly belongs to an extraordinary man who would be great if he had a little more actually functioning intelligence and more intense love. It remains to be seen whether I am wrong by discovering in him a tendency and an inclination to the founding or spreading of a religious sect. I cannot say more. This is even too much already.

PÜTTER: One might well say that, yes. A lucky experiment you conducted with those physiognomists.

LICHTENBERG: If physiognomy becomes what Lavater expects of it, they will hang children before they've done the deeds that deserve the gallows.

PÜTTER: But maybe we shouldn't talk of the gallows here, near the gallows' hill.

LICHTENBERG: I am glad that the noise has moved away. I still get the shakes when I think back to the morning I saw someone, for the first and last time, who awaited the gallows. That was before the Assizes in London. The poor fellow stood before the jury, and while they were reading the death sentence, the Lord Mayor of London was reading the newspaper.

PÜTTER: I think we had better take leave. The moon is already looking through the window.

LICHTENBERG: Waning and murky at that. There is nothing I hate more than the sight of the moon when—

QUIKKO: Gentlemen, you can hear the abusive remarks Mr. Lichtenberg is about to make toward us. It is beneath our dignity to follow it any further. I am switching off.

LABU: Without approval of the impulsive action taken by our most honorable colleague Quikko I am calling now on Mr. Peka to speak to his observations.

PEKA: Honorable gentlemen, you will all have noticed that the images of the spectrophone were clearer than ever, maybe due to the cleansed earth atmosphere cleared by thunderstorms. All of us could leisurely examine Mr. Lichtenberg, and I believe to be speaking for all of you when I say: we have asserted that the solution to our problem is closer than we thought. Mr. Lichtenberg seems to be an unfortunate figure. Not because of the outer circumstances that keep him in Göttingen, not because of his inner disposition that made a hypochondriac of him, but very simply because of his appearance. You must have noticed it, gentlemen: he has a hunchback. Yes, gentlemen, there's an easy explanation why a hunchback has nothing good to say about physiognomy. The man hardly has another choice than to form his own opinion about everything, since he cannot join the public opinion in at least one very important aspect, I mean *à propos* hunchback.

We should also not be amazed to hear him relate nasty things about Lavater, the enthusiasts, and geniuses. For someone who invites criticism through his own physiognomy has no other choice than to take the defensive position of a critic himself.

LABU: We thank Mr. Peka for his clear and timely remarks. Whether he has actually hit the bull's eye and whether such a hunchback is incapable of enthusiasm, of uplifting actions—that we should examine in further detail.

SOFANTI: This just in from Venus, and I would recommend that everybody take note. Fifty-year-old Lichtenberg, the enemy of the enthusiasts, who has been faithful to Reason all his life is about to betray her with the Muse. He is making poems, he is even reciting.

LABU: This should be a welcome opportunity to employ our parlamonium. We shall listen to the beginning of this poem and then have it translated into music.

SOFANTI: Silence please.

(Gong.)

LICHTENBERG: *(Measured, different from his usual intonation.)* What if once the sun did not come back, I often thought, when I awoke in a dark night; and I was happy when I finally saw daybreak again. The deep silence of early morning, the friend of thoughts, combined with the feeling of strengthened forces and renewed health all evoked in me such a mighty trust in the order of nature and the spirit who guides it that I felt so sure in the tumult of life, as if my fate were in my own hands. This sensation, I then thought, which you haven't forced or feigned and which allows you this indescribable comfort, must certainly come from that spirit, and it tells you aloud that you are at least thinking correctly now. Oh don't disturb, I spoke to myself then, this heavenly peace inside you with guilt! How could the coming day be dawning for you if this pure reflection of yourself did not throw it back inside you? What else do you expect from celestial music if not these observations? What is the concordance of the planets other than the expression of this certitude, which receives the spirit initially with wild bliss but then with more and more—

(The recitation has already been accompanied by music and fades at this point to a hymnlike melody—like one by Haydn or Händel. After a while this music becomes a funeral march.)

FIRST CITIZEN: Pretty decent number of mourners.

SECOND CITIZEN: Shhh—you can't talk here in the funeral procession! Just wait 'til we're there.

FIRST CITIZEN: (*A little softer.*) Pretty decent number of mourners, I wanted to say. When I think back at when they buried Bürger here . . . three men were following his coffin: Professor Althof—

SECOND CITIZEN: Shhh—you will get us all into trouble!

FIRST CITIZEN: Now the head of the procession has arrived. Soon the music is going to stop and it will get serious. Then they'll start with the speeches.

THIRD CITIZEN: He's supposed to have believed in wandering souls. I heard it myself from Poppe, the mechanic. He built his instruments for him, you know.

SECOND CITIZEN: Just look where I'm pointing! Don't you know it?

FIRST CITIZEN: Impossible, you're right, his window. So, that's where he could see his gravesite from his chamber. That's what I call being always at the ready.

THIRD CITIZEN: Well, he's supposed to have stood right at that window, following Bürger's funeral with his spyglass. But when he saw the hearse rolling right through the churchyard gate, his servant could hear sobbing from the next room. He could not stand to see when they lifted the body from the hearse. He pulled the shutters and closed the window.

SECOND CITIZEN: He was toying with death all his life. Seven years it's been, but I still remember it, as if it were yesterday: "The angels let me know lately, in a not unobvious way, that they are greatly inclined to having me dragged to the churchyard in a little portable house." Yes, that's what he wrote to me seven years ago.

THIRD CITIZEN: They say he believed in wandering souls.

SECOND CITIZEN: When his soul starts to wander, he might well reach the moon. He's always been very fond of traveling.

FIRST CITIZEN: Nobody can tell me that he was a professor of physics. "What is matter?" he's supposed to have said. "Maybe there is nothing like it in nature. First, they kill matter and afterwards they say it is dead."

THIRD CITIZEN: You don't have to believe what they say about him. He hasn't been among other people for a long time.—Over there, in the front, there's some movement. Now they've lowered the coffin into the ground.

FIRST CITIZEN: It is still annoying that the professors did not think it worthwhile to cancel their lectures for today.

SECOND CITIZEN: It's a pretty nice funeral procession anyway. If you remember Bürger's funeral where—

VARIOUS VOICES: Shhh, shhh, shhh! Insolent behavior, unrespectable company.

THE PASTOR: Most honored mourners, in particular the honorable representatives of the university as well as the good citizens of the town!

LABU: I now open the last meeting of the Moon Committee for Earth Research. A deplorable twist of fate has effected that the subject of our observations, Professor Lichtenberg from Göttingen, died before we were able to terminate our work. However, when I switched off the funeral service, the first sounds of which still reached you, I believe I was entitled to do so all the more, since our committee has every reason to hold a separate funeral service for Mr. Lichtenberg. For, gentlemen, what would become of our scientific honor, if we didn't admit that we owe the deceased a restitution. (*Murmuring of the committee members.*) The fact that man is not happy, gentlemen, has certainly become apparent. But we drew hasty conclusions from this. We concluded that he didn't amount to anything. Now, Professor Lichtenberg seems to ascertain this, since you will no doubt have inspected the voluminous register of the works of the deceased, those he wanted to write and never wrote. "The Cebu Island" and "Kunkel" and "The Parakletor" and "The Double Prince" and whatever they're called. But, gentlemen, maybe he didn't write books only because he knew about their fate. For each book, he thought, that was read through, thousands are only leafed through. A thousand others are lying still, others are forced in mouse holes, thrown after rats. On others, he says, they stand, sit, bang, and bake gingerbread. Still others are used to light pipes and to stand behind the window. Lichtenberg didn't think much of books but he much preferred thinking. Thanks to our photographic methods we already own the texts he entered in his diaries, which will apparently one day gain some reputation on earth. And these books, gentlemen, as you may have discovered yourselves, are full of odd, deep, and intelligent insights—insights, to which perhaps the undisturbed serenity of us moon inhabitants would never have taken him. Thus, most honored gentlemen, I dare calling into doubt the principle of our research: that people never amount to anything because they are never happy. Maybe it is their unhappiness that propels them—some even as far as Professor Lichtenberg, who is worth all the honors we can bestow, not only because of his moon maps. Therefore, I propose to elevate crater No. C.Y. 2802, where we hold our meetings, to the group of those here on the moon, which were dedicated to such terrestrial minds that seemed fit. The craters at the edge of the ocean of clouds, on the heights of the mountains of the moon, carrying the noble names of Thales, Helvetius, Humboldt, Condorcet, and Fourier, may take into their circle the crater Lichtenberg—clear, honest, and peace-

ful in the magical light that brightens our millennium, resembling the light that begins to shine from the writings of this terrestrial Lichtenberg. We conclude the research of the committee and switch on the celestial music.

(Music.)

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