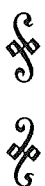


**Hamletmachine  
and  
Other Texts for the Stage**



**Heiner Müller**

**Edited and Translated by Carl Weber**

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ten before 1975 is *MEDEAPLAY* (1974). It was his first published exploration of a theatre of images after two decades spent in refining his use of poetic language for the stage. His skills as a poet and the power of his language were further reasons why many critics claimed Brecht's mantle for Müller.

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The introduction tries as much as possible to let Müller speak for himself, by way of quotes from discussions and interviews, and occasional excerpts from his writings. It is not intended to be a scholarly analysis but a first "guided tour" through his complex work and life. Both should be great stuff for academic research and learned investigation, and Müller has indeed become a favorite subject for European critics and scholars of theatre and literature.

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I'd like to thank Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, the editors and publishers of Performing Arts Journal Publications, for their courage in publishing this book, and for their support and neverfailing belief in our project.

My special gratitude belongs to Michael Roloff; his help and advice on the translations has been invaluable. Without his friendship this would have been a lesser book.

And last, not least, I thank my wife Marianne for her encouragement and her understanding.

C.W.



HEINER MÜLLER

## *The Pressure of Experience*

Performance artist Robert Wilson is creating one of his huge spectacles for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, in which artists from all over the world will participate, writing, composing, or performing for this ambitious venture, entitled *the CIVIL warS*. Among the names announced as collaborators are David Bowie and Philip Glass, David Byrne, Hildegard Behrens, Gavin Bryars, and an East German playwright and poet few people this side of the Atlantic had ever heard of—Heiner Müller.

At the 1983 Holland Festival ten companies from five countries were invited to The Hague to present nine plays during a special "Heiner Müller Festival." Not all of these productions were to be seen, though; the companies from Müller's own country were refused permission by the GDR authorities to travel to Holland, one of them Berlin's Volksbühne, which was to perform Müller's own production of his play *MACBETH*.

These incidents, in all their controversial aspects, indicate that Heiner Müller is acknowledged as an important playwright of our time; they also emphasize that his work and his positions are inseparable from the schizophrenia of today's partitioned Germany.

Müller is one of the few dramatists today who could be called a "universal playwright," a playwright asking questions and expressing traumas that concern all of contemporary mankind, not only one group, nation, class or culture. This may sound quite grandiose, yet Müller's vision is not a microscopic view. He observes man as if from another planet, through an immensely powerful telescope. He writes with the hope that what he calls "a universal history of man" is eventually going to begin, setting his utopia against the reality of universal misery he sees everywhere.

He grew up as a Marxist, first under Fascist oppression, then in a Socialist system he strongly believed in. Today, it seems he is becoming increasingly doubtful that a

linear concept of history as Marx, and before him Hegel, constructed it can encompass and/or define the complex situation contemporary mankind finds itself in. Yet, he is convinced that Communism, not necessarily the "Real Socialism" of the present Eastern bloc, remains as the only hope left, that our race will destroy itself and, maybe, the planet it inhabits if it continues to pursue the present political and social course. As he wrote of his last play, DESPOILED SHORE MEDEAMATERIAL LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS: "... it presumes the catastrophes which mankind is working toward. The theatre's contribution to their prevention can only be their representation."

Müller's "relatives" in the contemporary theatre are few. One could name Beckett, Genet and Edward Bond. Müller's last plays could certainly be called "endgames"; his MACBETH is close to Edward Bond's view of *Leary*; and THE TASK, even more, QUARTET show his affinity to Genet, about whom he said: "I believe that Genet articulated very precisely and correctly: The only thing a work of art can achieve is to create the desire for a different state of the world. And this desire is revolutionary." (Müller in an interview for *Der Spiegel*, May 9, 1983.)

None of this proves that Heiner Müller should by necessity find his place on the American stage. As long as a playwright fails to investigate aspects of life that are burning issues for a nation or a culture, he can at best become a most interesting, yet somewhat exotic, author to be studied by scholars and critics of the theatre. However, Müller is writing about issues which should concern—deeply concern—our society. To name only two: the role of the intellectual as an opinion-maker, and the terrible distance which separates even the most liberal and progressive member of a colonizing system from its colonized victims. It is certainly no accident that these two subjects moved to the center of his work after he visited the U.S., the first time as a writer-in-residence at the University of Texas in Austin, 1975, and later for an extended stay in 1978/79.

Comparison of his works written before and after his travels shows clearly how his experience of America altered his perception of the world. Among other things, his view of nature changed. If nature was barely of any importance in his earlier work, "landscape" is an increasingly important topic now. In a radio interview for *Deutschlandfunk*, April 9, 1982, Müller remarked: "What was new to me was the discovery that a landscape can be a political phenomenon, and that I can have a relation to landscapes, simply because of the dimensions of those landscapes over here. And because of the fact that they never can become quite domesticated. There always remains something more. Then, I found very interesting what enormous free spaces are produced by this sort of Capitalism on its fringes, simply rings where enormous values are wasted because they aren't negotiable, aren't marketable. In these fringes a lot of things can move. The Federal Republic or Switzerland are well-groomed front lawns compared with [the U.S.]. This archaic, even anarchistic, feature of [American] Capitalism I found very interesting."

He also observed the contorted and awkward stance of many American intellectuals and "opinion-makers" desperately trying to straddle the contradictions of an exploitative system that, while granting them all the freedoms, relegates them to a position of impotence. Once, when I asked him if HAMLETMACHINE wouldn't be difficult to understand for American audiences without the experience of European post-war history, he replied: "The general, objective situation isn't that dif-

ferent here. As an intellectual [in the U.S.] you belong at last to the middle class; as soon as you even make the beginnings of a career, as you have some success, you belong to the establishment you fight against. You get into the establishment by fighting it; as a writer of literature, for instance, there is no other way to join it, I believe. But then you're 'in' and live in the dilemma that you belong, yet don't like to. And it's quite typical here that once very good authors have written a best-seller, their tragedy of success begins; people are ground down by success."

Of course, the German intellectual who castrates himself deliberately, as he appears in Lenz/Brecht's play *The Tutor* for instance, had always been familiar to Müller. After all, he had suffered from the "tutors" of his own country from the time he began to write for the stage.

In his way, Heiner Müller defends the victimized individual oppressed by the forces of modern industrial society more aggressively than most contemporary playwrights, even as he anticipates the defeat and final disappearance of the individual in this struggle, declaring that "the individual subject doesn't interest me anymore." He focuses a pitiless and deep-cutting stare at all our assumptions about the individual and the society in which he lives, at the forces that mold human society, and the history that propelled mankind towards its present, perhaps doomed, state. This harsh view, and the "pessimistic" stance he often has been accused of, have to be seen against the background of Central European history.

Heiner Müller is very much a son of his nation, and the obsessions and traumas inflicted on the German people—and inflicted by them on others—have become his own. The German "split"; the "two souls dwelling in my breast" the archetypal German, Dr. Faustus, agonizes over; Hamlet,—"this 'very German' character," as Müller once said—torn apart by the contradictions of existence; the divided Germany of today's political map—no other German writer represents these schisms as boldly and clearly in his life and work. This "schizophrenia" is one, if not the most important, reason why Müller lives in East Berlin while freely using his privilege to travel to the West whenever he pleases, a privilege he feels guilty about at the same time. He explained his position in the *Der Spiegel* interview quoted earlier:

Q.: Haven't you lived already some time in the no-man's-land between the two German states?

H.M.: Of course, this back and forth between two very different German realities has a schizophrenic effect. The GDR is important to me because all the dividing lines of our world go through this country. That's the true state of the world and it has become quite "concrete" in the Berlin Wall. There exists a much greater "pressure of experience" in the GDR than here [in West Germany] and that's of interest to me professionally: the pressure of experience as a pre-condition of writing. Life is more obliging on the Eastern side of the Wall and that also constitutes the compulsion to think everything through radically to its end, to formulate everything to its end, while here you still can play around it."

Thinking radically, investigating the social and historical trends of our world to their final, if lethal, consequence: these are the tasks that concern Heiner Müller. Once he articulated his experience of "writing radically": "My pen sometimes 'resists' the text I force it to put on paper." This statement reveals that the process of writing has become more and more an integral part of the result, which is incor-

porated in Müller's texts. He doesn't believe anymore in keeping himself, the writer, outside of his texts in a detached position. This is nowhere more evident than in *HAMLETMACHINE* when the photo of the author is torn on stage. Yet, it is also a central aspect of the portrait of a writer in *LESSING'S SLEEP DREAM SCREAM*, or of *LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS*. Müller explained in 1978: "A phase has ended for me. I have to find a new approach now. The historical substance has been used up for me from the vantage point I tried to employ while writing about it . . . You can't come to grips with the macro-structures [of society] anymore by way of literature. Now the problem is the micro-structure . . . The author can't ignore himself anymore . . . If I don't talk about myself I'll reach no one anymore."

Tearing his own photo in *HAMLETMACHINE* was a forceful way of talking about himself, a powerful metaphor for the author's view of himself. When asked about this "new approach" in the *Deutschlandfunk* interview quoted earlier, Müller specified: "At bottom, playwriting always means to me that a picture is torn, a picture of myself too. In one play one picture is torn, from this a new picture originates. And that has to be torn again. That is actually the process." This never ceasing re-assessment, a constant probing of his experience and its implications, has become increasingly important in Müller's writing since he visited America.

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In a discussion with Sylvere Lotringer published 1982 in *Semiotext(e)*, Müller remarked: "I'm always in a difficult situation when I'm forced to interpret my own writings. I write more than I know. I write in another time than the one I'm living in." This statement is a far cry from the opinions held by the young journalist and budding author of the early fifties who was an ardent admirer of Brecht, and eventually became the German dramatist who was called "a successor of Brecht," with good reason. Lately Müller has defined his position in contrast to Brecht—tongue in cheek—using the term "parricide," in a panel discussion at a conference of the International Brecht Society, held May 1979 at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Müller's early plays, of which *THE CORRECTION* (1957) in this volume is a sample, were written in the Epic mode Brecht had established. Müller emulated ideas Brecht discussed in his last years, designs for a theatre Brecht liked to call "Dialectic Theatre," a dramaturgy replacing the earlier "Epic Theatre." Müller's first plays could also be considered as pieces for "a new, operative form of Agitprop-Theatre" that Brecht so insistently encouraged in the mid-fifties. Anyone familiar with Brecht's work, especially his writings on theatre and his directorial achievements at the Berliner Ensemble, will recognize the influence when reading *THE CORRECTION*. Yet, as closely as the play follows an Epic dramaturgy, some of its structural features point to tendencies in Müller's later work that didn't come fully to the fore until the mid-seventies; some short pieces, fragmentary scenes like *THE SHEET*, he wrote early in the fifties and didn't publish until twenty years later as part of the text *THE BATTLE*, also tried to transcend the Brechtian model.

However, until and including the play *CEMENT* (1972), Müller employed in most respects a dramaturgy that was a development and extrapolation of Brecht's

structures, even when he introduced some far reaching and important innovations within this framework, for instance in *MAUSER* (1970), his treatment of a theme from Brecht's *Die Massnahme* (*The Measures Taken*). *GERMANIA DEATH IN BERLIN* (1971) was his first leap out of the confinements of Brecht's model and towards the new form of the "synthetic fragment," as Müller later called it. Seemingly disparate scenes, or parts of scenes, are combined without any particular effort at a coherent, linear plot. The result is a kind of assemblage, much like a not yet fully structured work-in-progress, such as Georg Buchner's fragment *Woyzeck*, for example. Müller's "fragments," of course, are painstakingly crafted texts, "synthesized" from often widely diverse constituents, as *GUNDLING'S LIFE FREDERICK OF PRUSSIA LESSING'S SLEEP DREAM SCREAM, HAMLETMACHINE, THE TASK, and DESPOILED SHORE MEDEAMATERIAL LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS* attest. This is a dramatic structure, or rather anti-structure, he has developed and refined to arrive at a dramaturgy which could be defined as "post-structuralist" or "deconstructionist."

All this labelling has to be taken with some caution. Müller defies labels others try to pin on him. He never ceases to surprise his critics and to baffle his audiences. Again and again he has disowned statements he made in the past, happily admitting that his opinions are changing as the world and his perception of it changes. In 1975, while in America, he noted that he reads his past writings "like the text of a dead author."

Today, he considers Brecht's "theatre of enlightenment" an obsolete tool for the treatment of the complex reality of our age, and he is convinced that a new dramaturgy, a new concept of theatre, a new strategy of performance has to be created, or, rather different strategies for each prospective audience, as he himself demonstrated when he directed two productions of his play *THE TASK*, one at East Berlin's "Volksbühne" for that theatre's small studio stage, the second on the lavishly equipped main stage of the Bochum theatre in West Germany. The productions were drastically different, even though the same actor played the central part of Debuissou, since Müller knew he was addressing two utterly different audiences that brought to the performance vastly differing historical experiences. Müller regards theatre/performance as a means to influence audiences, and in this he still is in agreement with Brecht. It isn't the purpose of Brecht's theatre he is questioning, it is the method. Most of the plays regarded as belonging to Brecht's "mature," "classic" period, especially the parables, are, in Müller's opinion, not only outmoded but poor drama. What bothers him here is Brecht's attitude, the attitude of the man who knows better, who tries to manipulate one into accepting his answer as the only correct solution. Müller refuses to give answers; he offers the problem, poses the question, presents the conflicting attitudes and opinions, and challenges the spectator to take sides, or to withhold involvement. He doesn't pretend he knows more than his characters, he speaks "through their masks," as he wrote in our questionnaire, "I'M NEITHER A DOPE NOR A HOPE DEALER," published at the back of the volume; he is not the demiurge who creates his own controlled world on stage but a man who tries to rid himself of the contradictions life forces on him by giving them body and voice. In the *Semiotext(e)* interview he explained: "I believe in conflict. I don't believe in anything else. What I try to do in

my writings is to strengthen the sense of conflicts, to strengthen confrontations and contradictions. There is no other way. I'm not interested in answers and solutions. I don't have any to offer. I'm interested in problems and conflicts."

Brecht, of course, also believed in putting contradictions on stage, but Müller sees in Brecht's later works an effort to escape these contradictions, to provide solutions and tutor the audience.

"Out of [Brecht's] revolutionary impatience with the immaturity of the conditions [for the revolution] stems the trend to substitute the proletariat, a trend that leads to paternalism, the disease of all Communist parties. In defense against the anarchic-natural matriarchy, the re-construction of the rebellious son into the father-figure begins, which makes for Brecht's success and hinders his impact. The relapse into popularity—by re-introduction of the Culinary that determined his later works—turned into an anticipation when the dementing maelstrom of the media sucked it up and Socialist cultural policy posthumously cemented the father-figure. What failed to take place was the present; his wisdom—a second exile. Brecht: an author without a present, a work between the past and the future. I hesitate to articulate this as a critique: the present is the age of the industrial nations: the history of the future won't be made by them, that's to be hoped; it will depend on their politics if we ought to fear the future. The categories 'wrong' or 'right' miss the essence of a work of art. Kafka's Statue of Liberty held a sword instead of a torch. It's treason to use Brecht without criticizing him."

Müller wrote this in 1980 in an essay *Fatzer ± Keuner*, whose title refers to the protagonist of Brecht's *Fatzer* fragment and the Keuner character of Brecht's collection of anecdotes, *Stories of Mr. Keuner*. Müller himself had two years earlier adapted a stage-version from the enormous fragment which Brecht never finished. He felt and still feels great affinity to the Brecht who struggled with the *Fatzer* epic, and who eventually admitted he couldn't resolve its problems and contradictions. Exactly in this aspect rests the greatness of *Fatzer* for Müller, namely that Brecht posed the conflicts but didn't force answers and easy solutions on the material.

It is this attitude that we can discover in *THE TASK*, in *HAMLETMACHINE*, and in *QUARTET*. As Müller explains in the questionnaire, he prefers drama to prose because: "Writing drama you always have masks you can talk through . . . I can say one thing and say the contrary." Of course, this ambiguity in the recent plays is disturbing to many of his critics, and they have attacked him for it. Müller seems rather to be amused by these attacks, and by the hype with which other critics praise his work, especially when his texts are taken literally, as direct reflections of political events or positions.

When the journalists of *Der Spiegel* volunteered such a literal interpretation of *THE TASK*, he replied: "You can't simply align politics and art on parallel tracks, I believe. If you translate an idea into an image, either the image will become askew or the idea will be exploded. I prefer the explosion."

His images that "explode ideas" have frequently been accused of being obscure and dense, even deliberately confusing not only Müller's audiences but his interpreters, too. In the *Spiegel* interview, he offers some advice to directors and actors: "My texts are frequently written so that every, or every second, sentence shows only the tip of the iceberg—and what's underneath is nobody's business. Then the

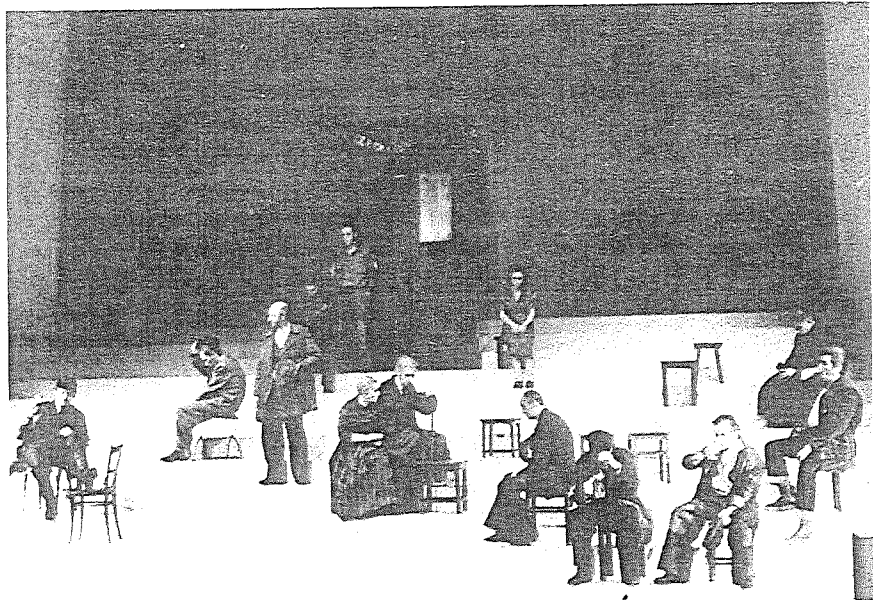
theatre people put on their wetsuits and dive down, looking for the iceberg or building their own . . . That is hard to prevent, I have to live with it." On the confusion of his audience he remarked: "Isn't it a problem of the audience that refuses to accept that the theatre has a reality of its own and doesn't portray, mirror, or copy the reality of the audience? . . . Naturalism nearly killed the theatre with this strategy of doubling [reality]." Finally he commented on the "dark vision" his theatre supposedly presents of the world: "I find all my plays relatively funny. I never cease to be amazed that this comic aspect is noticed so rarely and used so little. I have written one true comedy, *DIE UMSIEDLERIN*. Maybe the fact that it was taken terribly seriously and that it resulted in my expulsion from the Writers Association is one reason why I've put on such a serious mask since." Again the reference to a mask Müller puts on. It is possible to see only the masks, and fail to recognize the man behind them, as the friend who, having read the plays in this edition, asked: Who is Heiner Müller?

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Heiner Müller was born January 9, 1929, in Eppendorf, a small town in what used to be Saxony. Today the town belongs to the district of Karl Marx Stadt in the Southern part of the GDR. His family was of working class background, his father an office worker who had become a political activist and small functionary in the Social Democrat Party during the Weimar Republic after World War I. Müller was barely four years old when, on January 30, 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. Müller writes in his 1958 story "The Father": "January 31, 1933, at 4 a.m., my father, a functionary of the German Social Democrat Party, was arrested from his bed. I woke up, the sky outside the window black, noise of voices and footsteps. In the next room books were thrown onto the floor. I heard my father's voice, higher than the strangers' voices. I climbed out of my bed and went to the door. Through the crack of the door I watched as a man hit my father in the face. Shivering, the blanket up to my chin, I laid in bed when the door to my room opened. My father was standing in the doorway, behind him the strangers, big, in brown uniforms . . . I heard him call softly my name. I didn't answer and kept very quiet. Then my father said: He is asleep. The door was closed. I heard how they took him away . . ." Müller reflected on this event in the *Semiotext(e)* interview: "That is my guilt. I pretended I was sleeping. This really is the first scene of my theatre." This event, the experience of Fascist brutality and of his first "treason" in the face of it, became a trauma in Müller's life and work, as he has said on many occasions.

Indeed, the topos of treason appears in Müller's plays from the first to the last: The hero of *DER LOHNDRÜCKER (THE SCAB)* (1956), Balke, has committed treason—he informed on a Communist colleague in 1944 and caused the man's arrest; Jason in *MEDEAMATERIAL* betrays his barbarian wife. It is a topos, in Müller's case, inseparably linked to history, specifically German history from Hitler's terror to the present threat of nuclear holocaust. "One year after the arrest," he writes in "The Father," "my mother received permission to visit him in the camp . . . We stood in front of the wide gate with the wire mesh until they brought my father . . . The gate wasn't opened. He couldn't shake our hands

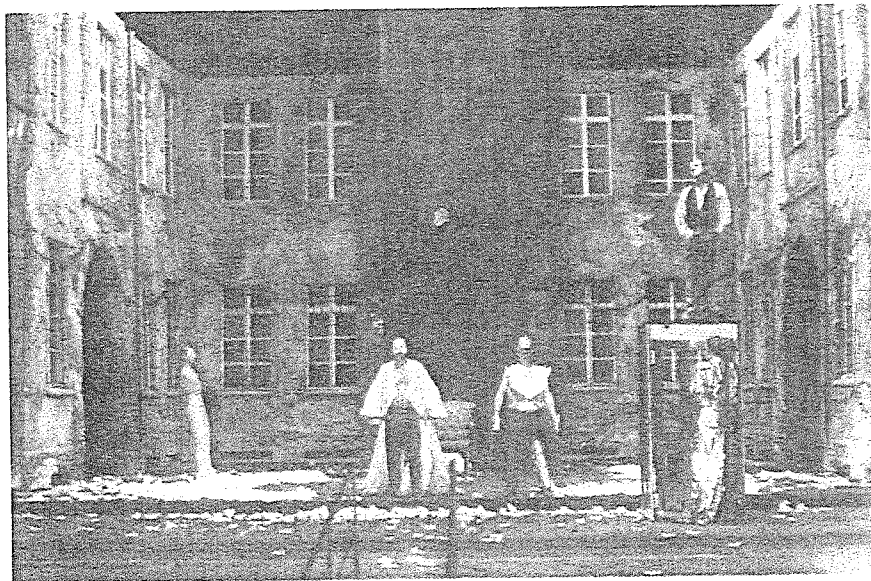




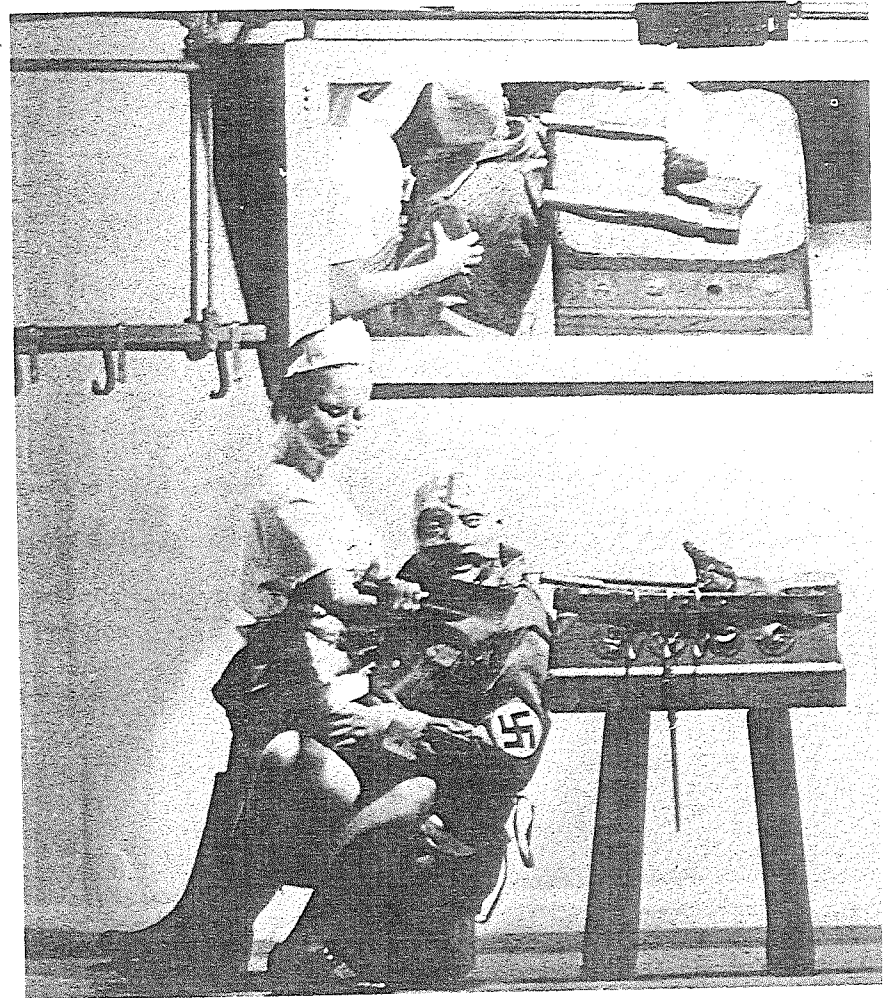
Eva Kemlein

THE FARMERS, the revised version of *Die Umsiedlerin*,  
at Volksbühne, East Berlin, 1976.

MACBETH, in Heiner Müller's own production at Volksbühne, East Berlin, 1982.



Adelheid Beyer



THE BATTLE, at Volksbühne, East Berlin, 1975.

through the fine mesh of the wire. I had to step close to the gate to see all of his thin face. He was very pale. I can't remember what was said. Behind my father, the armed guard stood, his face round and rosy." Müller explained to Lotringer: "I couldn't understand why he didn't jump over the fence."

More traumatic images: the well-fed face of those in power, the fence as a symbol of enforced separation. Another event of his childhood is recalled by Müller as "the second experience of treason": his father, eventually released from the concentration camp, wasn't able to find work. As a boy Müller had to write for an assignment in school an essay on the "Autobahn," the network of highways the Nazis built in the mid-thirties in Germany. His father first told him not to worry about it but then he proffered his help, advising Heiner to laud Hitler for building the Autobahn, and put into the essay a sentence stating his hope that "my father might get a job there." Müller mentioned later that this event estranged him from his father.

In the war years, Müller went to high school until he was drafted at the age of sixteen into the Labor Force (Reichsarbeitsdienst), during the final twitchings of the Hitler regime. In 1945, these young units were sent to the front, and he witnessed the last fighting in Mecklenburg in Northern Germany. Briefly a POW with the Americans, he managed after two days "to wander away quietly," as he put it. He simply began to walk home. "There were rumors that on entering the Soviet Zone all women were raped and the men slain. I expected to find the first corpses behind the shrubbery at the roadside. The Soviets gave us shelter and we got pea soup. The next morning we were assigned to a convoy that had to walk to the nearest county seat. There they gave us ten minutes to fade into the landscape and fend for ourselves. I made the hundred kilometers to my hometown in a few days." Müller described this final war experience to Jacques Poulet in an interview for *France Nouvelle*, January 29, 1979.

After the war, Müller eventually finished high school and worked for some time as a librarian. He began to write, so it seems, around this time.

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In 1949, the partition of Germany became final when the two German states, the Federal Republic of (West) Germany, and the (East) German Democratic Republic were constituted in short order. The "German schizophrenia," so decisive for Heiner Müller's writing, had become manifest.

His father who had again been a Social Democrat functionary after 1945 was expelled from the newly formed SED (Socialist Unity Party) into which Communists and Social Democrats had been fused. He was accused of being a "Titoist," because of "problems concerning the person of Stalin," Müller told Poulet. In 1951, his son met him after his defection in West Berlin. Müller described the encounter to Lotringer: "They discovered he had some kind of bacteria, something he never had before. So, he was put in a hospital and isolated. We talked through a glass door. He was standing on one side of the glass and I was standing on the other side. That was the next image." He refers to the glass door as another traumatic imprint in his memory, like the fence of the concentration camp and the door in which his arrested father stood. These images were to become important for his theatre.

When asked why he didn't consider following his father to the West, Müller replied: "I didn't really think about it then. Maybe I did identify with East Berlin or the Russian system more than he did. For the most part I wanted to be alone. I suppose it was a good way of getting rid of your parents . . . I believed in Communism. Stalin had nothing to do with it. I learned about Stalin through my father." His father eventually became a public servant in West Germany, administering pension payments to widows of Nazi officials and to former officers of the Wehrmacht, a fact Müller regarded as a paradox, an irony of history, but also as a kind of retribution. In his story "The Father" which he wrote six years after the defection, he accuses his father of trying "to keep himself out of the war of the classes," a theme which was going to become one of the central concerns of his later work.

The first major literary text of Müller was published by the cultural weekly *Sonntag* in a segment devoted to young authors, in December 1951. Titled "The People Are on The March," it was the story of a strike in a capitalist factory. The magazine introduced the piece as an "idiosyncratic treatment of the topic," but it didn't go against the grain of the ideological line all publications had to follow during those years of monolithic party rule in Stalin's realm. Throughout his early years as a writer, Müller's published texts don't show any disagreement with the aims and practice of the East German Republic and its controlling party, the SED.

June 17, 1953, a strike of construction workers at East Berlin's Stalinallee (Stalin Avenue) triggered a general uprising in the GDR that was spurred on by the Western media and squelched in three days by the Soviet army. The violent struggle left a deep and ambiguous impression on Müller. It wasn't until 1971, nearly twenty years later, however, that he dealt with the contradictions of those events in *GERMANIA DEATH IN BERLIN*. During the early fifties he had begun to sketch "counter scenes" to Brecht's *Private Life of the Master Race* (as the play is known in this country). Müller felt that Brecht had treated the phenomenon of "normal, everyday fascism" according to the yardstick of current Marxist theory, that consequently the true horror of the fascist mentality had eluded him. Müller's scenes were to correct this error. Yet, he didn't publish them until twenty years later; in the fifties, there wasn't much interest in an analysis of fascism that didn't fit the text-books. Through most of the decade, Müller made his living as a journalist, critic and editor for such magazines as *Sonntag* and *Junge Welt*, and he was briefly employed as a "scientific collaborator" with the "Schriftstellerverband," the Writers Association.

1956 was a crucial year for the further course of European history, and has become a kind of watershed in the history of Marxism. In February, Khrushchev revealed the full scope of Stalin's reign of terror during the XXth Soviet Party Congress. The debate on the abuses of the cult of Stalin began. Müller's mentor Brecht died in August. And in October, efforts to reform the Communist system in Hungary rapidly escalated into a full-scale revolution that was immediately exploited by the Cold War strategists and then crushed by invading Soviet forces after a week-long civil war. Many illusions on the left were shattered forever that year, many hopes brutally dashed. It was, of course, traumatic for Müller's development, as evident in his *HAMLETMACHINE*, a text he published twenty years later though the first scenes were written under the immediate impact of the events



of '56. The following year his first play was published, *DER LOHNDRÜCKER* (the closest sense in English translation, though unsatisfactory, is *THE SCAB*). He had written it in collaboration with his wife Inge, and her experience as a factory worker was invaluable for this tale of conflicts among workers of a plant that, in 1948, had just become a "company owned by the people," and where the efforts of one foreman to introduce more efficient working methods encountered the violent resistance of his colleagues. The play belongs to a genre the party in the GDR encouraged in the fifties, the so-called "production play." The same year, 1957, the East Berlin radio commissioned a text from him; it became the first draft of *THE CORRECTION*. And at East Berlin's Volksbühne Müller received his first production, his play an adaptation of an American book, John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook The World*. Written in collaboration with the theatre's dramaturg, Hagen Müller-Stahl, it opened to positive reviews in November 1957.

Müller had become known in East Berlin by this time and was regarded as a most deserving, if provocative, talent. His stories and poems appeared in various magazines and literary journals, and in April 1958 Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the party and, in fact, if not in title, the ruler of the GDR, lauded publicly "the promising work of Heiner Müller." That same year the Maxim Gorki Theatre in East Berlin invited him to join its staff as "dramaturgic collaborator," a position Müller held until 1959.

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It was in these years that I first met Heiner Müller. I was one of the young directors at the Berliner Ensemble where I had served since 1952 as an assistant to Brecht, as dramaturg and actor. Heiner asked if I would be interested in directing his play *DER LOHNDRÜCKER*. I wasn't only interested but flattered and quickly agreed. Müller arranged a meeting with the Artistic Director of the Gorki Theatre, Maxim Vallentin, to discuss the project. We had an amicable conversation and I explained my ideas for the production, yet Vallentin, one of the foremost representatives of "Socialist Realism," obviously wasn't impressed, or never intended to have an outsider from the Berliner Ensemble direct the play. In any case, I didn't hear from him again. Eventually, the play was premiered in Leipzig, and later opened at the Gorki Theatre, along with the revised version of *THE CORRECTION*, staged by a resident director of the company. When in 1959 Heiner and Inge Müller were awarded the prestigious Heinrich Mann Prize for *DER LOHNDRÜCKER*, it was the first widely visible recognition of their work.

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During the mid-fifties, Müller had penned three poems, dedicated to the writers he seems to have admired and who most clearly influenced him. These free verses contain very concisely the view he held of the writer's lonesome place in history. They also reflect his perception of his own life during these troubled years.

## BRECHT

Truly he lived in dark times.  
The times have become brighter.  
The times have become darker.  
If brightness says, I am darkness  
It spoke the truth.  
If darkness says, I am  
Brightness, it doesn't lie.

## MAYAKOVSKY\*

Mayakovsky, why  
The leaden full stop?  
Heartache, Vladimir?  
"Has  
A lady  
Closed him out  
Or  
Opened  
To someone else?"  
Take  
My bayonet  
Out of your teeth  
Comrades!  
*The walls stand  
Speechless and cold  
In the wind  
The banners are clanking.*

OR BÜCHNER, who died in Zürich  
A hundred years before your birth  
Age 23, for want of hope.

\*\*\*\*\*

It wasn't until 1961 that Müller completed another play, the year the Berlin Wall was erected and the partition of the city, and of Germany, cemented in concrete—a symbol for the divisions of our world, as Müller pointed out many years later. The new play was a comedy, *DIE UMSIEDLERIN*. The title is an untranslatable term that signifies a woman from the former Eastern provinces of the Reich, now being resettled in the GDR, as millions of Germans from those parts had to resettle in the two German states after World War II. The play was based on a story of the same title by Anna Seghers. The subtitle Müller gave his text states clearly its subject matter: *DAS LEBEN AUF DEM LANDE* (LIFE IN THE

\* Heiner Müller recently completed an adaptation of Mayakovsky's first theatre text, *Vladimir Mayakovsky Tragedy*, which the poet wrote in 1913. Müller's version was staged September 9, 1983, at Berlin's Schiller Theater Werkstatt.

COUNTRY). Müller draws a large, yet detailed panorama of the conflicts and contradictions Socialist agricultural policy and its participants, supporters as well as enemies, had to struggle with. A student theatre production of the play in September 1961, barely seven weeks after the sealing of the GDR borders, was closed after one performance by the party authorities. Its content was obviously regarded as dangerously explosive or subversive. As a result of this event and the ensuing debates, Müller was expelled from the Writers Association. At the time, this was a very harsh and economically inauspicious punishment. For two years Müller was, more or less, an "undesirable person." He could not publish, nor were his plays produced anywhere. He told me once that only the support of some friends enabled him to survive as a writer; they commissioned radio plays—some were detective stories—which he wrote under assumed names.

In 1963, however, two longer poems were published in the literary journal *Forum*, and in 1964 he received, as member of a writers collective, the coveted Erich Weinert medal. A new play he had written, based on an acclaimed novel, *The Track of the Stones* by Erich Neutsch, was accepted for publication by the GDR's most respected literary journal, *Sinn und Form* (1/2, 1965). THE CONSTRUCTION SITE, once published, was soon attacked at the XIth Conference of the SED Central Committee in December 1965 for "Neglecting the dialectics of the [GDR's] development." Erich Honecker, presenting the report of the party's Polit Bureau, even quoted a line from Müller's play as proof of negative trends in the contemporary cultural scene: "Our reality is seen only as 'the ferry between the Ice Age and Communism,'" and, later in Honecker's report, the spade is called a spade: "If we want to increase productivity and with it our standard of living, we can't spread nihilistic, hopeless, and morally subversive philosophies in literature, film, theatre, television, and magazines." This sweeping indictment was aimed at Müller, Wolf Biermann, Stefan Heym, and other artists in the GDR. A scheduled production of THE CONSTRUCTION SITE in Leipzig was cancelled. Once again, Müller found himself in conflict with official doctrine and, consequently, isolated. He said later about this time that "even shaking my hand seemed to become a test of courage for many of my friends and colleagues in the GDR."

His wife Inge, who had a history of psychotic depression, committed suicide in 1966. Müller had been living for years with this threat, and once recorded in a poem the sorrows on his mind during one of his sleepless nights.

SELF PORTRAIT TWO AM  
AUGUST 20, 1959

Sitting at the typewriter. Leafing  
Through a detective story. Going to know  
At the end what you already know  
The smoothfaced aide with the ever growing stubble  
Is the Senator's murderer  
And the love of the young Sergeant from Homicide  
For the Admiral's daughter will be returned.  
But you won't be skipping one page.  
Sometimes while turning the page a quick glance  
At the blank sheet in the typewriter.

*We will be spared at least that. That's something.*

In the paper stood: somewhere a village  
Has been razed to the ground by bombs.  
It's regrettable, but does it concern you?  
The Sergeant is just preventing the second murder  
Though the Admiral's daughter (for the first time!)  
Offers her lips, duty is duty.  
You don't know how many are dead, the paper's gone.  
Next door your wife dreams of her first love.  
Yesterday she tried hanging herself. Tomorrow  
She'll cut open her arteries or whatdolknow.  
At least she has a goal she can see  
That she'll reach one way or another.  
And the heart is a spacious graveyard.  
The story of Fatima in Neues Deutschland\*  
Was so badly written that you had to laugh.  
The torture is easier learned than describing the torture.  
The killer has walked into the trap  
The Sergeant embraces his prize.  
Now you can sleep. Tomorrow's another day.

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Though there seemed little hope to see them produced, Müller finished two plays in 1966: HERAKLES 5 and PHILOCTETES, both based on Greek mythology, or drama, but giving the old stories surprising new turns. PHILOCTETES was to become the first of a trilogy that continued and expanded Brecht's model of the *Lehrstück*. However, Müller's more visible efforts during the next years were various translations or adaptations of classic and contemporary plays, among them a libretto based on Eugene Shvartz' play *The Dragon*, DRAGON OPERA, for the composer Paul Dessau, and written in collaboration with Ginka Cholakova who was to become Müller's second wife. His OEDIPUS TYRANT, after Sophokles, had a highly acclaimed production by Benno Besson at Deutsches Theater and in 1967 became the first of Müller's works to be produced in West Germany. When Hanns Lietzau staged the hugely successful premiere of PHILOCTETES at Munich's Residenz Theater the following year, Müller was recognized finally by West German critics as one of the leading playwrights in the language.

Müller finished the second play of the *Lehrstück* trilogy, THE HORATIAN (1968), which he based on the same Roman myth Brecht once used, though arriving at a very different conclusion; and in 1969 his adaptation of PROMETHEUS opened at the Zürich Schauspielhaus. When the next year he was invited to join the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht's former company, as a dramaturg, it was obvious that the tide had turned for Müller. Some people felt he might eventually assume Brecht's mantle as the "playwright-in-residence" of the Ensemble.

\* Official daily newspaper of the SED. The war covered in the issue was the Algerian war of liberation from French rule.

With MAUSER, the last piece of his Lehrstück trilogy, he seemed to try a continuation in kind of Brecht's *The Measures Taken*. The densely constructed and highly poetic text presents only two characters, A and B, and a Chorus; it explores the question of revolutionary violence and results in the necessary acceptance of death by two Comrades to be executed for deeds committed in the service of the revolution. The play "looks into the white of history's eye," as Müller put it. He likes to quote a sentence by Ernst Jünger: "The blindness of an experience is the proof of its authenticity," pointing out that writing means to him "having an experience and, at the same time, formulating it in a way that others can share it." MAUSER marks a turning point in Müller's work. At issue is not so much the transmission of knowledge any more, but the task "to make experiences possible." The play has been attacked for its supposedly "Stalinist" position, a rather naive interpretation, totally misreading Müller's intentions. Yet, he never denied the fact that Stalin's reign was an integral part of Communism's history.

In 1971, he obviously felt he had enough distance from the disturbing events of the fifties to write about them in all their contradictions. He chose scenes sketched fifteen years earlier and extended them to a full-length play, *GERMANIA DEATH IN BERLIN*. The stretching of the Brechtian Epic model to its limits resulted here in the explosion of Brecht's "A-B-C dramaturgy," as Müller once referred to it. The text represents a sweeping panorama of German history, from the time of the Roman conquests to 1953, the year of the strikes and riots in the GDR. The events are shown partly in realistic scenes that employ poetically heightened language, partly in grotesquely exaggerated shapes that recall Grand Guignol, circus clowns, or the Bread and Puppet Theatre. The theme is the "German schizophrénia," the perennial war of brothers, from Arminius, tribal chief of the Cherusicans, whose brother Flavus fought him with the Roman legions, to the Nibelungs, Frederick II, and finally to a pair of brothers in Berlin, 1953, one a Communist, the other a former Nazi. A first example of the "synthetic fragment," the text consists of a rudimentary plot recounting events in the lives of various people from Berlin during 1953, yet disrupted by scenes from German myth and history which are presented in surreal, often grotesque, gory, or cartoon-like fashion; for instance, the Nibelungs appear at the battle of Stalingrad, Frederick II as a Clown or Vampire, Hitler and his consorts as the Holy Family, with a pregnant Goebbels giving birth to a Werewolf, etc. The play's wild, often violent, imagery and its terse, powerful language brings vividly to mind a line from a poem by Müller: "The terror I write about is of Germany."

The same year, 1971, Erich Honecker, newly installed chief of the SED, proclaimed at the VIIIth Party Congress: "There should be no taboos anymore for the arts as long as [the artist] stands on a firm Socialist position." The climate had changed. That year, Müller wrote his version of *MACBETH*, as unrelenting a reading of a Shakespearean fable as Edward Bond's *Lear*. It was soon produced at Brandenburg, near Berlin, quickly followed by productions in West Germany and Switzerland. *MACBETH* provoked a massive attack in *Sinn und Form* (1, 1973), by the prominent critic Wolfgang Harich, once a victim of Ulbricht who had him imprisoned in 1956. Harich's essay started the discussion about Müller's so-called "historical pessimism," a debate picked up later with a vengeance by some West German critics, as, for instance, Michael Schneider in *Literatur Konkret*, Fall

1979. While *THE HORATIAN* was produced at West Berlin's Schiller Theatre in 1973, Müller finished a play for the Berliner Ensemble. *CEMENT* was based on a Russian novel of the same title, written in the twenties by Fjodor Gladkov. It opened that same year, directed by Ruth Berghaus, with music by Paul Dessau. The play had a man-woman relationship at its center, going much further in this respect than, for instance, the earlier *CONSTRUCTION SITE*, and showing the conflicts of a married couple during the turmoils and struggles of the Russian civil war. Experimenting further in his "synthetic fragment" mode, Müller inserted material based on the Prometheus and Hercules myths.

The "montage" of various scenes he had written in the fifties and sixties was completed and became the texts *TRAKTOR* and *THE BATTLE* (1974), while at the same time his plays were being produced by the most prestigious companies in East and West Berlin, and in increasing number in West Germany, during the following years. There was also the first staging of a Müller play in a Socialist country outside the GDR, *CEMENT*, at Hungary's National Theatre, Budapest, in 1975. Official recognition was not lacking either: twice in the seventies he received the Prize of the East Berlin theatre critics, and, in 1975, one of the most important literary awards of the GDR, the Lessing Prize.

The same year Müller was invited to the University of Texas at Austin as a writer-in-residence. When Ruth Berghaus was forced to resign as the Artistic Director of the Berliner Ensemble, Müller also left the company, and in the Fall of 1975 he arrived at Austin. While in Austin, he collaborated on the first staging of his last Lehrstück, *MAUSER*, when it was produced by a student company. The all-women cast presented the piece as an aggressively feminist statement, an interpretation with which Müller was quite pleased, as he was, during his second visit to the U.S. (1979) with the Berkeley Stage Company production of *CEMENT*. After a semester in Austin, he and his wife travelled widely throughout the States and in Mexico. What he saw and what he heard left a deep and permanent impression on his thinking and his writing. Here, in America, he wrote his *PROJECTION 1975*:

*Where is the morning we saw yesterday  
The early bird is singing through the night  
In his red coat morning is walking through  
The dew that glistens from its steps like blood*

I'm reading what I've written three, five, twenty years ago like the text of a dead author, from an age when a death still could be fitted into verse. The killers ceased to scan their victims. I remember my first effort to write a play. The script got lost in the confusion of the post-war years. It began with the—youthful—hero standing in front of a mirror trying to discover which road the maggots would take through his flesh. At the end he stood in the basement and cut open his father. In the century of Orestes and Electra that's rising Oedipus will be a comedy.

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After Müller returned to Berlin, he accepted a position as dramaturg with East Berlin's Volksbühne. Some of his earlier but only one of the recent plays had their premieres at this theatre: *THE FARMERS*, a revised version of *DIE UM-*

SIEDLERIN, in 1976; THE CONSTRUCTION SITE and THE TASK in 1980. Here, he also began to direct his texts, first THE TASK—he directed another production two years later in Bochum, West Germany—and then MACBETH, in the Fall of 1982, the spectacular production invited but not performed at the Holland Festival the following year.

In recent years, his plays have been produced all over Europe in increasing numbers. There have been more than 25 productions in the GDR by now, nearly 100 in West Germany, 15 in Austria, more than 12 in Switzerland, and in translations his plays have been performed in England, Holland, France, Belgium, the U.S., Scandinavia, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Iraq, and one production is even documented for South Africa. In 1979, at the Mülheim Festival for New Drama, Müller was awarded the most prestigious West German Prize for playwrights, the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis, for his GERMANIA DEATH IN BERLIN.

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As he explains in the questionnaire, Heiner Müller holds a rather dim view of success. He'd rather "split," unsettle, provoke his audience. Writing about the dance theatre of Pina Bausch, he pointed out that in her theatre "the image is a thorn in our eye." That is exactly what Heiner Müller is trying to achieve in his own theatre: to pierce our eye so we'll be able to see better. He wants us to recognize that "The first shape of hope is fear, the first appearance of the new: Horror" as he said on several occasions. And he insists that he, as a person, should be of no interest: "My main existence is in writing. The other level of existence is just perfunctory." In a poem which became part of his text "The Father," he once stated:

I'd wish my father was a shark  
Who tore to pieces forty whalers  
(And in their blood I'd learned to swim)  
My mother a blue whale my name Lautréamont  
Died in Paris 1871 unknown

1871 was, of course, the year of the Paris Commune.

Carl Weber  
New York

## *The Correction*

# *Hamletmaschine*



HAMLETMACHINE (*Hamletmaschine*) was completed in 1977 and published in *Theater Heute*, Nr. 12, Seelze 1977. The world premiere was staged by Jean Jourdeuil on January 30, 1979, together with a production of MAUSER, at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe in Saint Denis, near Paris. (An earlier effort to produce the play in Cologne was given up after two weeks of rehearsal; this experiment is documented in: Theo Girshausen, *Müllers Endspiel*, Prometh Verlag, Köln 1978.)

According to the author, he was attracted to the Hamlet story since he first labored through the original in 1946, with the aid of a dictionary. In his opinion, Hamlet is "much more a German than an English character . . . the intellectual in conflict with history." Since the early fifties, Müller believes, the character has again become topical as in Brecht's perspective of the Danish prince: the man between the ages.

Müller wrote the first scenes for a Hamlet play in the fifties. The text published here was quickly written after Müller had translated *Hamlet* for a production by Benno Besson at the Volksbühne in East Berlin. The 200-page play he had conceived shrunk to eight pages, "the shrunken head of the Hamlet tragedy," as he likes to call it. He tried to create a variant of the Hamlet theme in a Communist country after Stalin's death, the story of the son of a high party functionary whose father died under obscure circumstances, yet later received a state funeral; i.e., Hamlet in the Hungary of 1956, a story reminiscent of the Rajk affair.

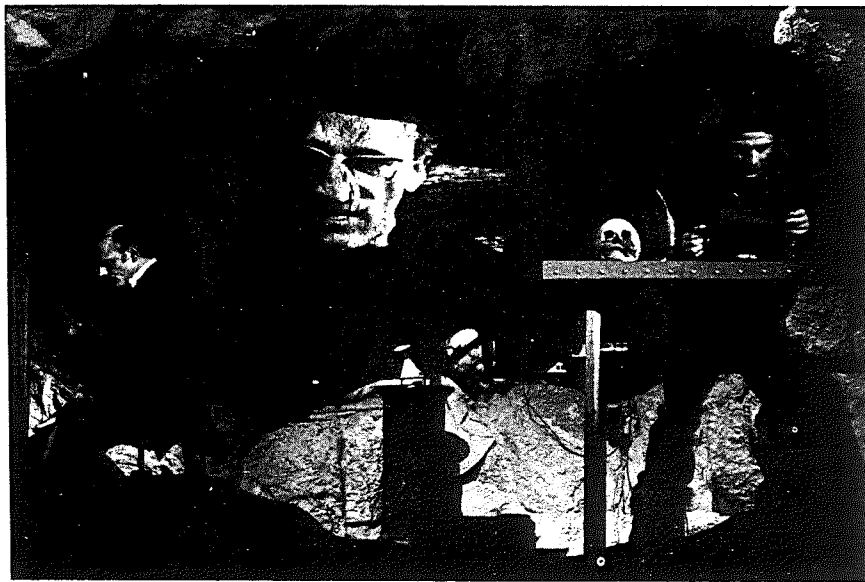
In a conversation about the text in 1979, Müller said that while he was writing the play "there was no historical substance for real dialogues, it turned into separate monologues of Hamlet and Ophelia. It became, more than ever anticipated, a self-critique of the intellectual. . . . It is the description of a petrified hope, an effort to articulate a despair so it can be left behind. It certainly is a 'terminal point,' I can't continue in this way." He added that for him "there is a cycle starting with DER LOHNDRÜCKER and concluded by HAMLETMACHINE." It is indeed his last play that deals in a direct way with Communist history of the twentieth century.

Müller stated about the other protagonist: "Ophelia has to do with Ulrike Meinhoff and the problem of terrorism in Europe, a complex issue that was very much, and in a very ambivalent way, on my mind while I wrote the piece. . . . The Ophelia-character is a criticism of Hamlet, consequently a self-critique; it contains autobiographical material dealing with the man-woman relationship of to-

day." In an American production, Müller felt "the main character here could rather be Ophelia than Hamlet. I wouldn't consider this as a disadvantage . . . it was my intention to make Ophelia a character of equal importance. That could become an interesting aspect in the U.S."

The last sentence of Ophelia's text, "When she walks . . ." quotes Squeaky Fromme who tried to assassinate President Ford. Müller explained, "I found it interesting that the Manson family was the pragmatic, unideological, puritan, Christian variant of European terrorism in the U.S.A. And I mean 'puritan' as of the origins, only a puritan-oriented society can produce such extremes. I believe the sentence contains a truth which wasn't necessarily known to that girl." Of course, the text contains numerous other quotes and allusions. It is probably Müller's most complicated text, and the most difficult to decode. "The title, HAMLETMACHINE," Müller said in a *Theater Heute* interview, April 1982, "was an accident. There was a project to print all of my texts that had to do with Shakespeare. We racked our brains for a title and hit upon 'Shakespeare's Factory' since I found that quite smart. And there was this play I had no title for and since I wanted an illustration from a book by Duchamp for the edition, the title HAMLETMACHINE resulted automatically. That was eventually interpreted: Hamletmachine = H.M. = Heiner Müller. I carefully disseminated this interpretation."

C.W.



Claude Le-Anh

HAMLETMACHINE, at Théâtre Gérard Philipe in Saint-Denis, 1979.

1

## FAMILY SCRAPBOOK

I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me. The bells tolled the state-funeral, murderer and widow a couple, the councillors goose-stepping behind the highranking carcass' coffin, bawling with badly paid grief WHO IS THE CORPSE IN THE HEARSE/ABOUT WHOM THERE'S SUCH A HUE AND CRY/'TIS THE CORPSE OF A GREAT/ GIVER OF ALMS the lane formed by the populace, creation of his statecraft HE WAS A MAN HE TOOK THEM ALL FOR ALL. I stopped the funeral procession, I pried open the coffin with my sword, the blade broke, yet with the blunt reminder I succeeded, and I dispensed my dead procreator FLESH LIKES TO KEEP THE COMPANY OF FLESH among the bums around me. The mourning turned into rejoicing, the rejoicing into lipsmacking, on top of the empty coffin the murderer humped the widow LET ME HELP YOU UP, UNCLE, OPEN YOUR LEGS, MAMA. I laid down on the ground and listened to the world doing its turns in step with the putrefaction.

I'M GOOD HAMLET G'VE A CAUSE FOR GRIEF\*  
 AH THE WHOLE GLOBE FOR A REAL SORROW\*  
 RICHARD THE THIRD I THE PRINCE-KILLING KING\*  
 OH MY PEOPLE WHAT HAVE I DONE UNTO THEE\*  
 I'M LUGGING MY OVERWEIGHT BRAIN LIKE A HUNCHBACK  
 CLOWN NUMBER TWO IN THE SPRING OF COMMUNISM  
 SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE\*  
 LET'S DELVE IN EARTH AND BLOW HER AT THE MOON\*

Here comes the ghost who made me, the ax still in his skull. Keep your hat on, I know you've got one hole too many. I would my mother had one less when you were still of flesh: I would have been spared myself. Women should be sewed up—a world without mothers. We could butcher each other in peace and quiet, and with some confidence, if life gets too long for us or our throats too tight for our

\*The lines with an asterisk are in English in the German text.

screams. What do you want of me? Is one state-funeral not enough for you? You old sponger. Is there no blood on your shoes? What's your corpse to me? Be glad the handle is sticking out, maybe you'll go to heaven. What are you waiting for? All the cocks have been butchered. Tomorrow morning has been cancelled.

SHALL I

AS IS THE CUSTOM STICK A PIECE OF IRON INTO  
THE NEAREST FLESH OR THE SECOND BEST  
TO LATCH UNTO IT SINCE THE WORLD IS SPINNING  
LORD BREAK MY NECK WHILE I'M FALLING FROM AN  
ALEHOUSE BENCH

Enters Horatio. Confidant of my thoughts so full of blood since the morning is curtailed by the empty sky. YOU'LL BE TOO LATE MY FRIEND FOR YOUR PAY-CHECK/NO PART FOR YOU IN THIS MY TRAGEDY. Horatio, do you know me? Are you my friend, Horatio? If you know me how can you be my friend? Do you want to play Polonius who wants to sleep with his daughter, the delightful Ophelia, here she enters right on cue, look how she shakes her ass, a tragic character. HoratioPolonius. I knew you're an actor. I am too, I'm playing Hamlet. Denmark is a prison, a wall is growing between the two of us. Look what's growing from that wall. Exit Polonius. My mother the bride. Her breasts a rosebed, her womb the snakepit. Have you forgotten your lines, Mama. I'll prompt you. WASH THE MURDER OFF YOUR FACE MY PRINCE/AND OFFER THE NEW DENMARK YOUR GLAD EYE. I'll change you back into a virgin mother, so your king will have a bloodwedding. A MOTHER'S WOMB IS NOT A ONE-WAY STREET. Now, I tie your hands on your back with your bridal veil since I'm sick of your embrace. Now, I tear the wedding dress. Now, I smear the shreds of the wedding dress with the dust my father turned into, and with the soiled shreds your face your belly your breasts. Now, I take you, my mother, in his, my father's invisible racks. I stifle your scream with my lips. Do you recognize the fruit of your womb? Now go to your wedding, whore, in the broad Danish sunlight which shines on the living and the dead. I want to cram the corpse down the latrine so the palace will hoke in royal shit. Then let me eat your heart, Ophelia, which weeps my tears.

HE EUROPE OF WOMEN

*normous room.\* Ophelia. Her heart is a clock.*

PHELIA (CHORUS/HAMLET):

am Ophelia. The one the river didn't keep. The woman dangling from the rope. ie woman with her arteries cut open. The woman with the overdose. SNOW ON ER LIPS. The woman with her head in the gas stove. Yesterday I stopped killing myself. I'm alone with my breasts my thighs my womb. I smash the tools of my ptivity, the chair the table the bed. I destroy the battlefield that was my home. I ag open the doors so the wind gets in and the scream of the world. I smash the

window. With my bleeding hands I tear the photos of the men I loved and who used me on the bed on the table on the chair on the ground. I set fire to my prison. I throw my clothes into the fire. I wrench the clock that was my heart out of my breast. I walk into the street clothed in my blood.

3

SCHERZO

*The university of the dead. Whispering and muttering. From their gravestones (lecterns), the dead philosophers throw their books at Hamlet. Gallery (ballet) of the dead women. The woman dangling from the rope. The woman with her arteries cut open, etc. . . . Hamlet views them with the attitude of a visitor in a museum (theatre). The dead women tear his clothes off his body. Out of an up-ended coffin, labeled HAMLET 1, step Claudius and Ophelia, the latter dressed and made up like a whore. Striptease by Ophelia.*

OPHELIA: Do you want to eat my heart, Hamlet? *Laughs.*

HAMLET: *Face in his hands.* I want to be a woman.  
*Hamlet dresses in Ophelia's clothes, Ophelia puts the make-up of a whore on his face, Claudius—now Hamlet's father—laughs without uttering a sound, Ophelia blows Hamlet a kiss and steps with Claudius/HamletFather back into the coffin. Hamlet poses as a whore. An angel, his face at the back of his head: Horatio. He dances with Hamlet.*

VOICE(S): *From the coffin.* What thou killed thou shalt love.  
*The dance grows faster and wilder. Laughter from the coffin. On a swing, the madonna with breast cancer. Horatio opens an umbrella, embraces Hamlet. They freeze under the umbrella, embracing. The breast cancer radiates like a sun.*

4

PEST IN BUDA / BATTLE FOR GREENLAND

*Space 2, as destroyed by Ophelia. An empty armor, an ax stuck in the helmet.*

HAMLET:

The stove is smoking in quarrelsome October

A BAD COLD HE HAD OF IT JUST THE WORST TIME\*

JUST THE WORST TIME OF THE YEAR FOR A REVOLUTION\*

Cement in bloom walks through the slums

Doctor Zhivago weeps

For his wolves

SOMETIMES IN WINTER THEY CAME INTO THE VILLAGE

AND TORE APART A PEASANT

*He takes off make-up and costume.*

## THE ACTOR PLAYING HAMLET:

I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. I'm not interested in it anymore either. I won't play along anymore. *Unnoticed by the actor playing Hamlet, stagehands place a refrigerator and three TV-sets on the stage. Humming of the refrigerator. Three TV-channels without sound.* The set is a monument. It presents a man who made history, enlarged a hundred times. The petrification of a hope. His name is interchangeable, the hope has not been fulfilled. The monument is toppled into the dust, razed by those who succeeded him in power three years after the state funeral of the hated and most honored leader. The stone is inhabited. In the spacy nostrils and auditory canals, in the creases of skin and uniform of the demolished monument, the poorer inhabitants of the capital are dwelling. After an appropriate period, the uprising follows the toppling of the monument. My drama, if it still would happen, would happen in the time of the uprising. The uprising starts with a stroll. Against the traffic rules, during the working hours. The street belongs to the pedestrians. Here and there, a car is turned over. Nightmare of a knife thrower: Slowly driving down a one-way street towards an irrevocable parking space surrounded by armed pedestrians. Policemen, if in the way, are swept to the curb. When the procession approaches the government district it is stopped by a police line. People form groups, speakers arise from them. On the balcony of a government building, a man in badly fitting mufti appears and begins to speak too. When the first stone hits him, he retreats behind the double doors of bullet-proof glass. The call for more freedom turns into the cry for the overthrow of the government. People begin to disarm the policemen, to storm two, three buildings, a prison a police precinct an office of the secret police, they string up a dozen henchmen of the rulers by their heels, the government brings in troops, tanks. My place, if my drama would still happen, would be on both sides of the front, between the frontlines, over and above them. I stand in the stench of the crowd and hurl stones at policemen soldiers tanks bullet-proof glass. I look through the double doors of bullet-proof glass at the crowd pressing forward and smell the sweat of my fear. Choking with nausea, I shake my fist at myself who stands behind the bullet-proof glass. Shaking with fear and contempt, I see myself in the crowd pressing forward, foaming at the mouth, shaking my fist at myself. I string up my uniformed flesh by my own heels. I am the soldier in the gun turret, my head is empty under the helmet, the stifled scream under the tracks. I am the typewriter. I tie the noose when the ringleaders are strung up, I pull the stool from under their feet, I break my own neck. I am my own prisoner. I feed my own data into the computers. My parts are the spittle and the spittoon the knife and the wound the fang and the throat the neck and the rope. I am the data bank. Bleeding in the crowd. Breathing again behind the double doors. Oozing wordslime in my soundproof blurb over and above the battle. My drama didn't happen. The script has been lost. The actors put their faces on the rack in the dressing room. In his box, the prompter is rotting. The stuffed corpses in the house don't stir a hand. I go home and kill the time, at one/with my undivided self.

Television The daily nausea Nausea

Of prefabricated babble Of decreed cheerfulness  
How do you spell GEMÜTLICHKEIT  
Give us this day our daily murder  
Since thine is nothingness Nausea  
Of the lies which are believed  
By the liars and nobody else  
Nausea  
Of the lies which are believed Nausea  
Of the mugs of the manipulators marked  
By their struggle for positions votes bank accounts  
Nausea A chariot armed with scythes sparkling with punchlines  
I walk through streets stores Faces  
Scarred by the consumers battle Poverty  
Without dignity Poverty without the dignity  
Of the knife the knuckleduster the clenched fist  
The humiliated bodies of women  
Hope of generations  
Stifled in blood cowardice stupidity  
Laughter from dead bellies  
Hail Coca Cola  
A kingdom  
For a murderer

## I WAS MACBETH

THE KING HAD OFFERED HIS THIRD MISTRESS TO ME  
I KNEW EVERY MOLE ON HER HIPS  
RASKOLNIKOV CLOSE TO THE  
HEART UNDER THE ONLY COAT THE AX FOR THE  
ONLY

## SKULL OF THE PAWNBROKER

In the solitude of airports  
I breathe again I am  
A privileged person My nausea  
Is a privilege

Protected by torture

Barbed wire Prisons

*Photograph of the author.*

I don't want to eat drink breathe love a woman a man a child an animal anymore.  
I don't want to die anymore. I don't want to kill anymore.

*Tearing of the author's photograph.*

I force open my sealed flesh. I want to dwell in my veins, in the marrow of my bones, in the maze of my skull. I retreat into my entrails. I take my seat in my shit, in my blood. Somewhere bodies are torn apart so I can dwell in my shit. Somewhere bodies are opened so I can be alone with my blood. My thoughts are lesions in my brain. My brain is a scar. I want to be a machine. Arms for grabbing  
Legs to walk on, no pain no thoughts.

*TV screens go black. Blood oozes from the refrigerator. Three naked women:*

*Marx, Lenin, Mao. They speak simultaneously, each one in his own language, the text:*

THE MAIN POINT IS TO OVERTHROW ALL EXISTING CONDITIONS . . . \*

*The Actor of Hamlet puts on make-up and costume.*

HAMLET THE DANE PRINCE AND MAGGOT'S FODDER  
STUMBLING FROM HOLE TO HOLE TOWARDS THE FINAL  
HOLE LISTLESS IN HIS BACK THE GHOST THAT ONCE  
MADE HIM GREEN LIKE OPHELIA'S FLESH IN CHILDBED  
AND SHORTLY ERE THE THIRD COCK'S CROW A CLOWN  
WILL TEAR THE FOOL'S CAP OFF THE PHILOSOPHER  
A BLOATED BLOODHOUND'LL CRAWL INTO THE ARMOR

*He steps into the armor, splits with the ax the heads of Marx, Lenin, Mao. Snow.  
Ice Age.*

5

FIERCELY ENDURING  
MILLENIUMS  
IN THE FEARFUL ARMOR

*The deep sea. Ophelia in a wheelchair. Fish, debris, dead bodies and limbs drift  
by.*

OPHELIA:

*While two men in white smocks wrap gauze around her and the wheelchair, from  
bottom to top.*

This is Electra speaking. In the heart of darkness. Under the sun of torture. To the  
capitals of the world. In the name of the victims. I eject all the sperm I have received.  
I turn the milk of my breasts into lethal poison. I take back the world I gave  
birth to. I choke between my thighs the world I gave birth to. I bury it in my  
womb. Down with the happiness of submission. Long live hate and contempt,  
rebellion and death. When she walks through your bedrooms carrying butcher  
knives you'll know the truth.

*The men exit. Ophelia remains on stage, motionless in her white wrappings.*

END

# Gundling's Life

## Frederick of Prussia

### Lessing's Sleep Dream Scream

*A Horror Story*

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\* English-language productions could use the entire quote from Karl Marx: Introduction to  
*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*.