

PROTEST AND LITERATURE – HERTA MÜLLER’S *DER FUCHS WAR DAMALS SCHON DER JÄGER* AND *HERZTIER*

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Abstract: Herta Müller is a controversial contemporary German writer born in Romania, whose works are deeply anchored in the East-European cultural, political and historical context. Müller’s autofictional novels turn into allegories of dictatorship, of the totalitarian power which cripples and crushes the individual, destroys the very essence of human dignity and freedom. Through the mastery of poetical language she depicts the historical reality of the communist regime, filtered through the lives of ordinary people, but she does this in such a way that she transposes the ultimate questions of repression and freedom of the individual into universal dimensions.

*The present paper aims at highlighting the protest character of Herta Müller’s two novels typically presenting the oppressive world of the Ceauşescu regime – *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* and *Herztier* –, having in view the investigation of the mechanisms of dictatorship, the decoding of images and metaphors of oppression and freedom, tracing Herta Müller’s discourse of protest culminating in the writer’s outcry for preserving human dignity and freedom in any reality that we live in.*

Keywords: Herta Müller, literature, protest, dictatorship, disintegration of the individual

The work of Herta Müller, the Nobel laureate (2009) German writer, born in a Romanian Banat-Swabian community, represents a special junction on the literary stage: revolving around the themes of dictatorship, totalitarian power, lack of freedom, the oppression of the individual, the power of words, Müller’s essays, short stories and novels are written in a language of magnificent poetry, revealing the cruelty of socio-historical reality and relaying the word of protest for individual freedom and dignity.

To understand Herta Müller’s work, critics must accept and acknowledge all aspects of her cultural identity, because her uniqueness lies in the juncture of the Banat-Swabian, Romanian, and German presence and the style in which she imagines and gives expression to them (Glajar, 2004: 152).

Herta Müller’s discourse of protest can be perceived as a very complex one as it is closely connected to the themes of her literary creation, her poetic language embodied often in memorable metaphors, allegories, as well as her reflections uttered during public speeches and lectures. Lyn Marven highlights that „writing and the possibilities of fiction are linked, in Müller’s work, with the political context of the Ceauşescu regime” (Marven, 2005: 83).

According to the author herself, the ultimate goal of the totalitarian regimes is to destroy everything; their task is to crush relationships, the very human substance. Müller clearly expresses that dictatorial power is not only a matter of the former Eastern Bloc countries, but it is a problem which should concern every political system. (“Peter Voß fragt

..." mit Herta Müller. "Diktatur und aufrechter Gang ...", 2013). When writing, the theme chooses her and not the other way round. It is an inner need to transpose into fiction the horrors she has experienced under the Communist rule and in the closed, national-socialistic community of the Swabian village:

Well, I think that the heavy weight ... that literature goes to where the weight is. And I lived under this dictatorship for over thirty years and that is where the injuries and the theme are... I did not choose this theme, the theme always seeks me out. This theme I shall not ... I am still not rid of this theme. And one has to write about the things that occupy one incessantly. And it's important, dictatorship ... for unfortunately that dictatorship was not the very last. Regrettably, there are still so many in the world (Müller, 2010: 7).

Literature cannot overcome the disintegration of the self, the effects of trauma, but it can transpose them into another medium: „by recreating and enacting them as fiction, it can reinscribe a tentative and contingent sense of subjectivity, which underlies Müller’s political resistance” (Marven, 2005: 114). The text of *Herztier* and *Der Fuchs war war damals schon der Jäger* “sustains poetic and symbolic language in the face of political repression and is itself, in its occasionally ambiguous poetic language, a political statement” (Marven, 2005: 95).

The novels *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* (1992) and *Herztier* (1994) portray the real nature of the Romanian dictatorship under Ceaușescu, the political terror, the misery and distress, the humiliation of the individual, they „are both documents of political persecution in an atmosphere of extreme fear and abandonment” (Glajar, 2004:133).

Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger, an adaptation of the screenplay of the film entitled *Vulpe vânător/ Der Fuchs der Jäger* by Herta Müller und Harry Merkle, documents the world of political oppression in the end phase of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania, it presents a terrifying picture of the demise of the Communist rule and the first days void of glory after the revolution in 1989, it portrays a completely ruined, devastated society. The teacher Adina, the central character of the novel, proclaims the process of mass harvest in the fields of the “patria” to be equal to the exploitation of children, she is threatened and sexually molested by the school director; moreover she will be persecuted and perpetually threatened by the Securitate, the Department of the State Security. In a world where seemingly everything is ruined, friendship remains the only value, but relationships often turn out to be corrupted. The identity of Clara’s lover is revealed: it is Pavel, the state security agent, who constantly pursues Adina and her friends. Adina and Paul flee to a remote border-village, as they find out that they are targets of the mass arrests performed by the Securitate. After receiving the news of the fall and death of the dictator, they return to the city hoping for the outset of a new socio-political era, but their illusions are completely shattered as they have to confront the same atrocious reality: the fox remains the hunter, the revolution requiring human lives has been a legerdemain, the old system values are thriving, the enormities against the very essence of the human dignity are proceeding.

Herztier is probably the most autobiographic or autofictional novel written by Herta Müller (Cooper, 2009: 484). The narrator is studying at Timișoara when she meets Edgar, Kurt and Georg, Swabian students from the Banat region. The tragic event of a roommate’s suicide

perceived as suspicious by the four students brings them together, a friendship, an alliance is born which constitutes the core interhuman network of the novel. The members of this union share their most intimate feelings of fear and alienation, they secretly read books smuggled from the west and discuss their own poetry. Although after graduating from university they are dispatched to work to different parts of the country, they maintain their friendship sending letters and visiting each other. Confronting with various difficulties, such as being released from the workplace, financial worries, persecutions by Captain Pjele, the vigilant watchdog of the Securitate, the four friends come to ponder upon immigrating to Germany. Georg, Edgar and the narrator arrive in Germany but they cannot escape the shadows of the totalitarian regime: Georg dies suspiciously, Tereza, a close friend of the narrator, proves to be a collaborator of the State Security and dies suffering from cancer, while Kurt commits suicide. The allusions from the first page of the novel suddenly become clear, Lola's death is represented by the belt, Georg was probably thrown through the window, the nut stands for Tereza's cancer, while the rope points at Kurt's death: „Ich kann mir heute noch kein Grab vorstellen. Nur einen Gürtel, ein Fenster, eine Nuß und einen Strick. Jeder Tod ist für mich wie ein Sack" (Müller, 2009: 7).

In *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* the author portrays a completely ruined society through a series of expressive images: people, the living beings, objects, buildings, streets appear as if in a surrealistic film – everything is rotten, gloomy, filthy and marked by the ever-presence of the dictatorial power. The streets are covered by piles of spit sunflower shells, the roses at the entrance of the blocks of flats form a dingy sieve of filthy leaves, in the jet-black streets the passerby is perceived as a noise, the dog Olga never barks, the telephone box smells like alcohol, russet and black cockroaches crawl on the cooker, warts cover the skin of people and the surface of the objects.

The workers in the factory are not the glorious constructors and workers of the fatherland, they are transformed into machines; the industrial accident resulting a worker's death is covered by a fictitious story of alcohol abuse at the workplace. In *Herztier* the recurring metaphor „das Proletariat der Blechsche und Holzmelonen" (the working class of tin sheep and of wooden melons) refers to the newly created Communist social class of villagers turned into factory workers, a failed experiment in its essence (Marven, 2005: 133). This leitmotiv embodies the intended control of people by coerced work for the construction of the fatherland, but the effort made does not result in any substantial benefit. The workers at a slaughterhouse, where Kurt is delegated as an engineer, appear as semi-human beings driven by animal instincts; they drink warm blood and lurk in silence. Cosmin Dragoste highlights the function of the images of animal parts which depict society as a slaughterhouse at a macro scale: Lola receives kidneys and animal tongues for her sexual favours, the children of the workers from the slaughterhouse play with cow tails (Dragoste, 2007: 194).

Mass meetings are prohibited, even a wedding procession is seen as suspicious, the celebrators are accompanied by the police. Microphones might be hidden everywhere, so when one is paid a visit the telephone should be placed in the refrigerator. Alcoholism is a common phenomenon; the consumption of Schnaps is an instinctive strategy of survival in a cage-like society. The same instincts operate in social interactions too, when people meet, instead of asking each other "how do you do", they ask "where do you stand with life?"

Und ein Widerspruch ist es, daß gewöhnliche Männer und Frauen sich in den Straßen der Stadt begegnen und den Sohn eines Toten erschrecken, weil sie statt WIE GEHT ES fragen, WIE STEHST DU MIT DEM LEBEN (Müller, 1992, 148).

The community is infected by animalistic sexual drive, sexual molestation is a common practice, women are used as sex-objects and sexual intercourse is promoted as a necessary means for reproduction through a coyly disguised central decree. As Herta Müller explained during a conversation hosted by the Boston University, in a dictatorship sexuality is the only private sphere, where the individuals are not subjected to any kind of control, it is the only possible form of personal freedom, which though becomes often fatal and a major source of unhappiness.

The social supply system characteristically reflects the principle of scarcity and portioning: one must queue for hours in order to get the bread ration; the collage refectory doesn't provide enough food for the students, the noise made by the refrigerator is a result of the frequently applied cut-off of electrical power. The various types of food and the consumer goods are perquisites of those who are in the service of the Securitate, Jacobs coffee, Chanel perfume, Nutella, fine tights, make-up or fresh meat are instruments of corruption and means of payment for informing activities. In order to earn additional money, women trade with panties when crossing the border with Hungary, or they smuggle jewellery hidden in their vagina.

In a deeply crippled society death is present everywhere, either as suicide, murder, slaughter, or as being resulted from various illnesses. In both novels the sight of corpses lying in the fields at the border has the function of deterring citizens from fleeing from the country. In Adina's vision those who had paid with their lives in their attempt of escaping pursuit while crossing the border may well become food for the others, as their bodies enrich the soil with proteins – a macabre picture of a cannibalistic society. The totalitarian regime exerts power even upon the dead. Lola is expelled post mortem from the university and excluded from the Communist Party, as her gesture of committing suicide is being interpreted to be an attack against the state and the nation.

The burdensome atmosphere of silence and fear enfolds the quotidian life; fear takes on human dimensions in *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*:

Da im Park der Hauch der Angst hängt, wird man langsam im Kopf und sieht in allem, was andere sagen und tun, sein eigenes Leben. Man weiß nie, ob das, was man denkt, ein lauter Satz wird oder ein Knoten im Hals. Oder nur das Heben und Senken der Nasenflügel. Man wird hellhörig im Hauch der Angst. [...] Wenn man lange im Café sitzt, legt sich die Angst und wartet. Und wenn man morgen wiederkommt, liegt sie schon da, wo man sich hinsetzt. Sie ist eine Blattlaus im Kopf, sie kriecht nicht weg. Wenn man zu lange sitzen bleibt, stellt sie sich tot (Müller, 1992: 46-47).

In an absurd way fear is the gluing element of friendship too, as it is expressed in *Herztier*. Due to the deeply rooted emotion of fear the four friends meet each other on a daily

basis, fear brings them close to each other but it is also perceived as an uncontrollable insidious entity:

Weil wir Angst hatten, waren Edgar, Kurt, Georg und ich täglich zusammen. Wir saßen zusammen am Tisch, aber die Angst blieb so einzeln in jedem Kopf, wie wir sie mitbrachten, wenn wir uns trafen. Wir lachten viel, um sie voreinander zu verstecken. Doch Angst schert aus. Wenn man sein Gesicht beherrscht, schlüpft sie in die Stimme. Wenn es gelingt, Gesicht und Stimme wie ein abgestorbenes Stück im Griff zu halten, verläßt sie sogar die Finger. Sie legt sich außerhalb der Haut hin. Sie liegt frei herum, man sieht sie auf den Gegenständen, die in der Nähe sind (Müller, 2009: 83).

The power of dictatorship penetrates every aspect of life, the mechanisms of the political machinery deprive the individual of their human rights and dignity, fear is omnipresent in a society which degrades its members into slaves. The gears of Ceaușescu's totalitarian machinery are the feelings of fear, terror, alienation and isolation. People live under constant oppression, prohibitions work as the major guidelines of existence. It is not permitted to express personal opinion, to oppose the ideology of the political regime, but it is a basic obligation to serve the power under any circumstances. In order to secure the submissiveness of the citizens, the central power resorts to the most effective tools for generating fear: interrogations, interceptions and persecutions.

In the state of terror the individual has only few possibilities for survival. As Valentina Glajar formulates it, „to control every move in the country, new socio-politically determined classes such as *Wächter* (guards) and *Mitmacher* (passive collaborators) emerged as a result of corruption and hypocrisy. For many Romanian citizens, regardless of their ethnicity, legal or illegal escape from Communist Romania seemed the only solution, as people risked their lives or wasted time, energy, and money to accomplish their goals” (Glajar, 2004: 133). The guards are the vigilant watchdogs, the inquisitors serving the dictator, the only recipients of socio-economical benefits; they are thoroughly trained executive agents of the central power having the task of instilling fear, isolating the members of society from each other using the effective tools of pursuit and observation. A great part of the society are transformed into passive collaborators, they represent the mass lacking the willpower of opposing the regime, under the pressure they become informers, denouncers, due to the fear instilled into their being they even betray their family or friends. The third option for the characters of the novels is to fight against the oppression, thus becoming enemies of the state, but their resistance is usually sanctioned by incarceration or death.

The popular methods of subduing the members of the society are those of persecution and interrogation. According to Wilhelm Berger the atomizing effect of terror subsists in the constantly present threat and fear of denouncement even by the people close to the respective individual, who as a result of the isolation and alienation process becomes incapable of showing any resistance (Berger, 2009: 87). In both of the novels the main characters are permanently threatened and seen as traitors of the state and the nation. Their homes are searched several times, they are followed in public spaces, their conversations are being intercepted and their correspondence is violated. The interrogation scenes expressively

present the process of fragmentation, disintegration and alienation of the subjects; in *Herztier* the narrator perceives herself as being deconstructed into members, organs listed on a piece of paper just as her belongings:

1 Jacke, 1 Bluse, 1 Hose, 1 Strumpfhose, 1 Höschen, 1 Paar Schuhe, 1 Paar Ohrgehänge, 1 Armbanduhr. Ich war ganz nackt [...].
 1 Adreßbuch, 1 gepreßte Lindenblüte, 1 gepreßtes Kleeblatt, 1 Kugelschreiber, 1 Taschentuch, 1 Wimperntusche, 1 Lippenstift, 1 Puder, 1 Kamm, 4 Schlüssel, 2 Briefmarken, 5 Straßenbahnkarten.
 1 Handtasche.
 Alles war aufgeschrieben in Rubriken auf einem Blatt. Mich selber schrieb der Hauptmann Pjele nicht auf. Er wird mich einsperren. Es wird auf keiner Liste stehen, daß ich 1 Stirn, 2 Augen, 2 Ohren, 1 Nase, 2 Lippen, 1 Hals hatte, als ich hierher kam (Müller, 2009: 144-145).

In *Der Fuchs war war damals schon der Jäger* the interrogation resembles a psychological cat and mouse game: the subject is virtually permitted to decide whether to become a collaborator of the Securitate, but through the means of extortion the individual is transformed into a puppet. The stake is high, as reference to the well-being of the subject's family members is made through the subtle revealment of a photo in the agent's briefcase:

Ich habe es geschrieben, WERDE KEINER PERSON; UNABHÄNGIG VON DER NÄHE ZU IHR, SAGEN, DASS ICH ZUSAMMENARBEITE. Ich habe den Kugelschreiber hingelegt und gesagt, das kann ich nicht schreiben. Er hat gefragt, warum, ich habe gesagt, damit kann ich nicht leben. [...] Na gut, hat er gesagt, ich dachte du brauchst deine Nachmittage für dich. Er hat den Kugelschreiber in die Jacke gesteckt und das Blatt zerknüllt und das Knäuel in den Aktenkoffer gesteckt. Er hat den Aktenkoffer ganz geöffnet, und ich habe darin ein Bild gesehen. Ich konnte das Bild nicht deutlich sehen, nur eine Wand. Ich wußte, ich kenne diese Wand. Du glaubst, wir laufen dir nach, hat er gesagt, du wirst noch von selber kommen. [...] Als er weg war, habe ich an dieser Wand meinen Vater gesehen, mit ausgehöhlten Wangen und großen Ohren. Es ist das letzte Bild, das meine Mutter von meinem Vater bekommen hat (Müller, 1992: 214-215).

Captain Pjele (*Herztier*) and Pavel Murgu (*Der Fuchs war war damals schon der Jäger*) are both agents of the Department of the State Security. In the novels they appear as shadows following the main characters, intruding into their most private sphere. Both agents have dedicated themselves to the service of the dictator, they infiltrate in the lives and social network of the protagonists, they perform their duties in a very meticulous manner. After the outbreak of the revolution Pavel manages to flee the country making use of false identity, an event which signals the continuance of the totalitarian power mechanisms despite of the formal demise of the communist regime. Captain Pjele's effort to crush the four friend's resistance seems to be futile, but eventually he finds the proper manoeuvre: he proposes to them to legally leave the country as they belong to the German minority in Romania. The West German immigration policies allowed people of German ethnicity living in the Eastern

Bloc to claim German citizenship (Cooper, 2009: 475), which according to the Romanian opportunistic policies resulted in two essential gains: disposing of the unwanted minorities and gaining economical benefits. The narrator, Edgar, Kurt and Georg are forced by the circumstances to accept this possibility, as their lives have been completely made impossible. They are now perceived by society as criminals, outsiders. Beside the persistent interrogations and persecutions they are dismissed from their workplace in a society, where not participating in the construction of the state through daily work is unacceptable and illegal.

The whole society is centred on the personal cult of the Communist dictator Ceaușescu. In *Der Fuchs war war damals schon der Jäger* his omnipresence is suggested by the repetition of specific metonymical constructs, “‘der Diktator’ exists only as metonymy: his presence is as official portraits, of which only the ‘Auge’ and the ‘Stirnlocke’ are mentioned in Müller’s work”(Marven, 2005: 79). The black of the dictator’s iris and the ringlet on his forehead are permanent signs of an imminent danger lurking in the shadows, they are the embodiment of constant oppression and pursuit. The omnipresent and omniscient camera-like eye is the Big Brother who punishes every deviation from the norm (Dragoste, 2007: 151).

Die Zeitung ist rauh, doch die Stirnlocke des Diktators hat auf dem Papier einen hellen Schimmer. Sie ist geölt und glänzt. Sie ist aus gequetschtem Haar. Die Stirnlocke ist groß, sie treibt kleinere Locken auf den Hinterkopf des Diktators hinaus. Die werden geschluckt vom Papier. Auf dem rauhen Papier steht: Der geliebteste Sohn des Volkes [...]. Das Schwarze im Auge sieht jeden Tag aus der Zeitung ins Land (Müller, 1992: 27).

In *Herztier* the dictator is denoted through the metaphor “Pflaumenfresser”, the guards of the communism, as well as the dictator are repeatedly called plumsuckers. People who consume green plums¹ are considered to be unscrupulous traitors who lack any moral values. They are those members of the society who thrive and prosper at the others’ expense.

Sie pflückten schnell, füllten sich Beutel in die Jacken. Sie wollten nur einmal pflücken und lange davon essen. Wenn ihre Jackentaschen voll waren, entfernten sich schnell von diesen Bäumen. Denn Pflaumenfresser war ein Schimpfwort. Emporkömmlinge. Selbstverleugner, aus dem Nichts gekrochene Gewissenslose und über Leichen gehende Gestalten nannte man so. Auch den Diktator nannte man Pflaumenfresser (Müller, 2009: 59).

The metaphor of green plums is a linking element between the two kinds of dictatorship, the one exerted by the political power and that of the village: the narrator’s father drinks alcohol produced from the darkest plums, eating green plums superstitiously causes death, the dictator is the major plumsucker. Through the narrative technique of flashbacks Herta Müller outlines the world of a Swabian village where time is frozen: the ultimate

¹ The title of the English translation (by Michael Hofmann) is *The Land of Green Plums*. “The German title, *Herztier* or heart-beast, is a word used by the narrator’s grandmother as she enjoins her to “rest your heart beast,” or be at peace. The narrator herself repeats this phrase standing over her grandmother’s dead body at the close of the novel. The English title refers to the admonition of the protagonist’s father not to eat green plums, for the soft pits cause a “raging fever [that] will burn your heart up” (Cooper, 2009: 484).

pressure of the community to adapt to the traditional values destroys the independence of the individual. In the ritualized quotidian life of the village the contours of distinctiveness disappear, thus the village turns into a closed, paralysing micro universe, where those who put up resistance become outcasts. The individual is under constant observation, the conformity to the norms of the community is more important than personal happiness. Physical and psychic aggression, alcoholism, arranged marriages are accepted and cultivated on a regular basis. Public opinion functions as the supreme form of control, any deviation from the old norms settled by the community is perceived as a threat. University education is seen as a community disintegrating factor; this is why the mothers of the protagonists resort to the means of spiritual blackmail to call their children back to the village, sending letters with details of their real or coined diseases.

The Swabian community is characterised by rigid ethnocentrism – a result of the general fear of dissolution, of hybridization, of loss of identity; joining this closed society is not permitted for outsiders, people of different ethnical backgrounds. Interethnic marriages are taboos, the national socialist past hasn't been confronted yet; the inability of facing the burdensome historical past is reflected through the father figure of the narrator repeatedly denoted as the graveyard maker singing songs dedicated to the Führer: „ein heimgekehrter SS-Soldat, der Friedhöfe gemacht und die Orte schnell verlassen hat“ (Müller, 2009: 74).

The four friends in *Herztier* manage to escape the totalitarian, prison-like world of the Swabian village, although they are deeply marked by their childhood experiences in a community where they have been victimized. In the city they have to learn the norms of another dictatorship, those of the Communist regime, whose shadows pursue them even after immigrating to Germany. In *Der Fuchs war war damals schon der Jäger* the machinery of dictatorship continues to work even after Ceaușescu's death. In the world of the novel turned upside down the perpetrators become victims and the victims turn into perpetrators, as suggested through the image of the fox-fur rug. Initially the child Adina is craving for a fox-fur rug which later is converted into the main tool of the Securitate used to terrorize her. Intruding repeatedly into Alina's flat the agents cut off the limbs of the fox with a razor and join them loosely again, thus the dismembered fox-fur rug becomes one of the most effective means of psychic torture signalling the omnipresence of the Securitate ready to eliminate the enemies of the State, it is the utmost symbol of manhunt. Fragmentation is not just a physically performed process in Adina's home, but it characterizes the inner state of the main character too, who due to the extreme fear experienced on a daily basis perceives her own body as separate members, limbs, organs:

Adina zieht die Hände vom Tisch. Der Tisch ist warm, wo die Hände lagen. Und da auf dem Boden unten, wo der Fuchs der Jäger ist, legen die Finger abgeschnittene Füße ans Fell. Und danach, wenn die Hände oben den Tisch gewärmt haben, greifen Sie an die Stirn. Die Hände spüren, daß die Stirn genauso warm ist, daß sie jedoch im Unterschied zum Tisch nichts mehr vom Wohnen weiß (Müller, 1992: 241).

The mutilated fox fur embodies the perception of the self generated by the constant surveillance, the penetration of the individual's most intimate sphere, by the permanent state of fear. "Adina's body mirrors the fox fur: as she checks for its severed limbs (the sign that

the *Securitate* have been in the flat), her body too is divided into parts” (Marven, 2005: 78). The *Securitate* infiltrates into the mind of the individual even from a physical distance, Adina’s possessions bear the fingerprints of the agent, she finds the objects moved to a different place, the toilet seat is raised, the cigarette butts float in the water, the fox-fur rug is dismembered. The perpetual state of fear alters her mode of perception, she is unable to observe the objects in their natural implicitness. She perceives herself and the world from the “foreign view” (der fremde Blick), being under surveillance turns one into an observer too:

Weil der Verfolger nicht nur körperlich anwesend, sondern auch aus den intimsten Dingen heraus, die ihn personifizieren, beobachten kann, fühlt sich der Bedrohte, was immer er in seiner Wohnung mit sich und seinen Gegenständen tut, mit dem Verfolger Aug in Auge und beobachtet sich und ihn gleichzeitig (Müller, 2008: 138).

Ceaușescu’s death is expected to bring about the end of this terror regime, to liberate the oppressed society, but in effect everything remains unaltered: the officials change their positions, the criminals flee and escape punishment, the established political power wears another mask and the fox remains the hunter: the head of the fox-fur rug is cut off after the official demise of the regime.

„Wenn wir schweigen werden wir unangenehm – wenn wir reden, werden wir lächerlich” is the first and the last sentence of the novel *Herztier*, but Herta Müller has also published an essay entitled this way. The reflections in the essay shed light not only on the framing lines of the novel but on Müller’s attitude towards the topics of her own discourse and literary creation, the process of writing, speaking and the state of being silent. According to the author, uttered words cannot always express reality in its own essence, especially a burdensome one overwhelmed by fear; there are moments when the contours of the words simply vanish. Remaining silent is not the opposite of speaking, it is a mental state of self-reflection: when we become silent, we feel unease, when we speak we become ludicrous. Writing might resemble speaking on the surface, but the written sentences rather relate to the experienced facts the way silence relates to speaking: “Von außen gesehen, ähnelt das Schreiben vielleicht dem Reden. Aber von innen ist es eine Sache des Alleinseins. Geschriebene Sätze verhalten sich zu den gelebten Tatsachen eher so, wie sich das Schweigen gegenüber dem Reden verhält (Müller, 2008: 85). On the other hand Herta Müller decided to break the silence and to reveal the crimes of the Romanian dictatorship, taking into account that the uttered words require responsibility, and when these fail, she resorts to writing (Cicero Rednerpreis, 2013).

Herta Müller’s literary creation reveals around the clash between the political power and the individual, the themes of persecution, abasement, homelessness, freedom, dignity, topics which are or should be of a general interest and importance at any time:

I wish I could utter a sentence for all those whom dictatorships deprive of dignity every day, up to and including the present—a sentence, perhaps, containing the word handkerchief. Or else the question: DO YOU HAVE A HANDKERCHIEF? Can it be that the question about the handkerchief was

never about the handkerchief at all, but rather about the acute solitude of a human being? (Müller, 2010: 25).

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