

Herta Müller—Antigone Changes Trauma into Memory

(On Fear and Ethical Graves)

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HERTA MÜLLER is a writer who is strategically positioned between modernism and postmodernism. I am using the term “strategically” to refer to the way in which this author has deliberately fashioned an inimitable, distinctive style. The theme that is obsessively, contrapuntally reiterated in her works revolves around the traumas associated with the oppressive communist system and the abuses perpetrated by the Security. Over and over again, in all of her writings, the strands of this theme are woven together, in concentrated form, and then, out of an exorcising impulse, they are fractured, disjointed, pulverized and endlessly disseminated. On the one hand, the author focuses on a core theme that is obsessively resumed in her fiction (Müller’s commitment to this theme appears to be resting on a lifetime covenant). On the other hand, the architecture of her prose is conceived in such a way as to thoroughly intra-disseminate (and not just extra-disseminate) this thematic core, in slow motion, as it were, like in a detailed and systematic anatomy lesson, which is nonetheless watched by the readers through broken, shattered lenses. It is as if an explosion has caused the anatomical theater to collapse, much like a mosaic that breaks down or a jigsaw puzzle that is taken apart, like a door to the self that is unscrewed from the hinges, for both individual, therapeutic and collective, cognitive purposes. This atypical writer, situated at the interface between modernism and postmodernism (or at the contagious junction between these two *-isms*), would most likely have appealed to scholars like Hans Bertens, Brian McHale and Simon Malpas, whose theoretical studies address precisely the conceptual and artistic passageways between modernism and postmodernism: if they had had access to Herta Müller’s works, these texts would have provided them with excellent case studies in support of their theoretical standpoints.

Hans Bertens, for instance, places the discussion about the old and the new modernisms in a syncretistic framework, considering that they are not simply divided by a rift, by a rupture, but also united by an assumed legacy.¹ In fact, at one point, Bertens asks himself whether the term best suited for the idea of the post-modern is that of the para-modern.² Indeed, if we were to place Herta Müller’s prose works on the dissection table, among all the *-isms*, what would appear to be striking would be the manner in which the author inserts surrealist references in her otherwise brutally realistic nar-

ratives. Such insertions signal a transition from modernism (here, the definite influence exerted on Müller's writings is that of the Dada Movement and Surrealism, deemed to be pre-post-modern by many researchers of postmodernism) towards postmodernism or beyond modernism in any overt sense.

Brian McHale plays ironically with the notion of a conceptual transition from modernism to postmodernism, analyzing, by way of exemplification, the narratives of Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Carlos Fuentes. McHale tauntingly and empathetically addresses the idea of postmodernism representing the natural successor of modernism, which it does not seek to overcome in aggressive manner, but which it inherits slantingly, obliquely. Thus, postmodernism is the successor (at the level of poetics) and, at the same time, the reactionary contestor of modernism. Simply stated, postmodernism belongs to the posterity of modernism in a natural sense.³ Herta Müller would certainly not be interested in such conceptual distinctions that could be applied to her prose works, except, perhaps, at an intuitive level. However, her case would have very logically served McHale's demonstration.

Finally, Simon Malpas diagnoses, theoretically and practically speaking, a plurality of modernisms and postmodernisms, whose forms, we may infer, were – predictably – not divisively separated, but syncretically intertwined.⁴ Considering that Herta Müller advocates plurality in all spheres of life and, especially, in art and politics, it is not difficult to surmise that her prose would have fitted Malpas's perspective like a glove.

Herta Müller's book that most saliently conveys the concrete idea of trauma is, from my analytical viewpoint, the novel *Astăzi mai bine nu m-aș fi întâlnit cu mine însămi*⁵ (*Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*, translated into English as *The Appointment*), a book akin to *Regele se-nclină și ucide*⁶ (*The King Bows and Kills*), as narratives about the interrogations to which the author was subjected during Ceaușescu's regime and the psychological pressures she had to withstand. It is a literary testimonial reminiscent of Vladimir Bukovsky's autobiographical novel *And the Wind Returns ...*⁷ Whether in prison or in the would-be space of freedom, Bukovsky's resistance solution (which was also addressed by Nicolae Steinhardt, the former political prisoner, in his confessions about the "Churchill-Bukovsky" solution, included in the "political testament" that was placed at the beginning of his *Journal of Happiness*),⁸ consisted in a relentless recalcitrance against the regime, in the adoption of a tough attitude toward the members of the communist repression apparatus, in the refusal of any compromise, in the passionate struggle against the concentration camp system, but also, to the extent that this was possible, in deceiving the authorities. Bukovsky accepted no surrender and vehemently defended his opinions. He often fought back his investigators with articles from the Soviet code. His intransigent stance led him to mock his accusers, who perceived him as an impregnable "tank." Committed to a psychiatric hospital (of transit), Bukovsky experienced a period of tumult alongside sham lunatics, such as protesters, dissidents and opponents, who formed an ironic community. From here, he was dispatched, like many others, into a hospital with a prison-like regime, where he was incarcerated among genuinely alienated individuals: in these hospitals, the caretakers, the nurses and the guards (some of them former common law criminals) were the masters of the place. Dissidents were forced to undergo pharmaceutical treatment (they were drugged)

or were tortured. Vladimir Bukovsky's testimony crucially revealed the psychiatric abuses committed against dissidents (deemed to be "irresponsible" individuals) in the Soviet Union.

As it is featured in Herta Müller's works, terror has already been certified by Cosmin Dragoste as the author's matricial and overarching theme. Death is also a dominant theme, in the sense that in Müller's texts, everything regresses towards death.⁹ Highlighting the same theme, Dana Bizuleanu has explicitly entitled her book *Fotografii și carcase ale morții în proza Hertei Müller* (*Photos and Carcasses of Death in Herta Müller's Prose*), in which she analyzes in detail the transfer-images in these narratives.¹⁰ In his as yet unpublished PhD Thesis, Radu Pavel Gheorghiuș has revealed the umbilical connections between Herta Müller's (self-therapeutic) writing and the abusive functioning of the communist dictatorship in Romania, which represents the author's key chronotope.¹¹ Gheorghiuș has signaled out the coeval rapports between the background of terror under Ceausescu's regime and another specific background of the author, the dilapidated German, Swabian village, under the control of Power. Thus, Herta Müller aims "to heal through writing the self-avowed trauma of one who has been deprived of her homeland, a trauma caused not by the country of origin, but by a political regime which becomes the target of her criticism in everything she writes: in her novels, in her essays and in her journalistic texts."¹²

In *The Appointment*, Herta Müller deems it more important to narrate the moments of waiting prior to the interrogation than the interrogation itself. The questioning is, foreseeably, abusive and traumatic (the novel is, *de facto*, a case study). The book focuses on the trauma of waiting as a preamble to the subject's interrogation: in capturing the ritual of waiting, the author investigates the psychological instrumentation of fear (with all its shades and nuances). The impending interrogation causes the individual to experience fear and anxiety or, rather, creates a platform for the manifestation of deep anguish. Hence, the crucial function of detail in Müller's narrative, developed into a neo-realistic lyrical needlework, filled with moods, sensations, artifacts and landscapes. The history in *The Appointment* "hyperbolically inflates personal quotidian experience."¹³

How does the heroine attempt to stave off the fear triggered by this traumatic waiting? She leaves her luck at home—this is a metaphor for the way in which popular folk wisdom about fate and luck is reassembled as a shield against the aggression methods practiced in the totalitarian regime. Then she puts on totemic garments (a green blouse) and eats a walnut—ritualistic food, meant to make the woman who is about to be interrogated by the authorities strong, unreachable, unbreakable. The walnut comes to stand for an excised personal "tumor" (a totemic object). It is a sanitizing, cleansing tumor, which is stronger than the (malignant) tumor of the totalitarian state, encapsulated in the interrogation procedure. Having ingested the walnut (the removable "tumor"), the heroine can barricade and fortify herself against the investigation conducted by the Security. Some objects acquire talismanic value for the psychological functioning of the heroine, as Cosmin Dragoste also remarks.¹⁴ The pathological or pathologized states before the interrogation (insomnia, anguish, tetchiness, nervous tension between individuals) are conveyed in the novel with astounding perspicuity and, often, in a poetic way. Although these are negative moods, they are rendered in Herta Müller's prose lyrically, almost like self-standing poems.

It should be noted that the same symbol, the tumor, serves as a trade mark for the totalitarian regime, both in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward*¹⁵ and in Herta Müller's works.¹⁶ The walnut counteracts, at the same time, the severed finger of a victim, which the heroine receives as a camouflaged forewarning and as a concrete threat from her investigator (Major Albu). A piece of flesh severed from the body of another victim becomes the trademark of those punitive times, intended to shock, to haunt and to horrify these other potential victims.

The fragility and, sometimes, the power experienced during the moments of waiting before the interrogation depended on the subject's ability to manipulate and control time. Time could be stretched past its breaking point (made to unravel) in such a way as to intensify fear and dread to the verge of explosion. This outburst, however, was followed by a period of psychological recovery. Then the ordeal was resumed, from the beginning, like a leitmotif.

Vladimir Bukovsky, already mentioned above, experienced another psychological state before investigation: he was exalted, frenzied, energized by the impending questioning procedure. By contrast, the female protagonist of *The Appointment* is horrified by the approaching inquiry. Her totems (the blouse, the walnut) form an armor, a shield that she builds for herself, lest she should cave in, emotionally and psychologically. Why does Herta Müller insist on these accessories? Because the heroine negotiates a particular transaction: she proposes a concrete *and* symbolical exchange, trading fear for luck. If luck stays at home and she takes fear with her, to the interrogation, the latter will unravel and decompose but luck will be retrieved upon returning home. This retrieved luck will energize the traumatized interrogated woman, enabling her to regenerate her forces until the next interrogation, preventing her from surrendering to the torturers. This is, in fact, a sort of game of dominoes, a game which is stopped short, lest the pieces tear down one another, one by one, getting locked in formation before collapsing.

The stylistic and narrative technique in *The Appointment* is replete with details which function as means of self-encouragement and fortification: everything that can be spotted before the interrogation (on the street, at home, everywhere else) is described in slow motion. Details protect and defend the woman who is about to be investigated, mentally assaulted and spat at by Major Albu, the prototypical Security officer from the time of Ceaușescu's regime. Details make up a screen, a protective wall and a form of psychic armor. The psychological method of amassing details also includes recourse to memories, whose function is to slow and tone down the dread associated with these questioning practices. Later, the interrogating officer himself becomes a pretext for a thorough and detailed description, his portrayal representing a direct solution, inside the interrogation, of counteracting fear.

The heroine trains herself to become able to partly stay in control of her own interrogation. Lying becomes a verbal structure meant to protect her and to curb the aggressiveness unleashed during the inquiry. Otherwise, she would risk giving in to betrayal and surrendering. Capitulation is a conditioned human state, but betrayal is an immoral state that is optional, being grounded in non-ethical abandonment. In *The Journal of Happiness*, Nicolae Steinhardt spoke about the victim's self-defense through deceit and untruthfulness (in an investigation). Detention proved to be fruitful for Steinhardt because

of his conversion to Christianity (the prison became a place of self-transcendence and fulfillment for him), but also because of his strong moral structure, which compelled him, during interrogations, to use psychological weapons that were equal to those of his opponents (investigators, torturers) and to train himself for this confrontation.

A few stories of life, destroyed or marred by the dictatorship, are inserted in the breaks between the interrogations: the history of the life and death of Lili (a frontier-crosser who was shot and mauled by the hounds of the border troops), the story of Paul (the heroine's partner, who was also harassed by the Security, through absurd or dangerous techniques). The story of her grandmother's deportation is steeped in atrocious details, yet even when she recounts extreme horrors and sufferings, the author does not give up lyricism and metaphors. She refuses to convert her text into a mere photographic snapshot. What Herta Müller continually aspires to do is to capture motion blurs in her photographic prose, strewn with surrealistic or, at least, with somewhat unreal insights. Even horror can be poeticized. Of all the stories, the history of Lili becomes, in the novel, a sort of tumulus, a funerary monument, a burial of ethical import.

The Appointment is also a novel about informants and delation, as well as a novel of broken love and unfulfilled expectations. There is so much trauma and anguish in the woman who is awaiting interrogation and is subjected to various interviews that she can no longer love and is incapable of fully committing herself to an erotic relationship. Under dictatorships, the ideal of love must be aborted.

Herta Müller has a purposely crabbed, jolted style, as if she did not master the language in which she is writing, but this is a trick of the author's: the subtext reveals that this is a serious narrative game, deliberately predicated on stylistic challenges. Herta Müller's rhetoric is demonstratively confusing or alembicated, with lyrical insertions in the narrative fabric, designed to poeticize the story and disturb it structurally, linguistically and syntactically (this the author's discursive brand). Her style amounts to this narrative-lyrical or lyrical-narrative hybrid (the two ingredients share equal percentages at the stylistic level), often deploying surreal images and metaphors, which would, as a rule, be unacceptable in prose with realistic ethical stakes (in historical and autobiographical terms). This lyrical surrealism that has found its way into a serious novel is the defining note of Herta Müller's prose, which, by distorting reality, suggests the trauma and deformity induced by the totalitarian regime in which her characters live.

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INTERROGATION IS obsessively present also in a previous novel, often regarded as the author's most accomplished text: *Animalul inimii* (*Herztier*, published as *The Land of Green Plums* in English translation).¹⁷ Unlike *The Appointment*, with its acute and realistic incisions, *The Land of Green Plums* is an absurd-surrealist novel, significantly featuring lyrics by Gellu Naum (the well known Romanian perfect surrealist author) as its motto. This is not a pure or sublimated strand of the absurd, but a morbid one, heralding, at a synoptic level, the tragic occurrences in *The Appointment*. The author's obsessive core themes, related to the sufferings of a minority humanity at the hands of the repressive apparatus, are also approached here: the student Lola hangs herself and

is excluded, post-mortem, from the Romanian Communist Party, being expelled (also posthumously) from college, during an official meeting that exposes her culpability: the homeland rejects self-incurred death, enacted without the approval of official Power! There is then the history of a clandestine subversive group, including Edgar, Kurt and Georg. All three of them write non-patriotic literature and wish to emigrate, as a last resort, to avoid the dictatorship and the punitive regime. However, Georg commits suicide after emigration; Kurt is assassinated by the Security, before emigration; only Edgar and the female narrator of this story end up in Germany, where they continue to be harassed by the agents of the dictatorship through intimidation, pressure, threats, letters, friends-spies and traitors. There is, then, the story of all types of frontier-crossers: those who attempt to swim across the Danube River, those who camouflage themselves in freight trains or those who try to cross the borders hurriedly, stealthily. The tattered, decomposed corpses of many of these would lie abandoned in the corn fields, left unburied until they melted into the ground. One of the author's obsessive themes is, in fact, this aggressive funerary image.

It becomes evident, therefore, that Herta Müller's memory is blatantly conceived as the memory of an Antigone, despite the quasi-surrealist, lyrical-narrative style of her text. In almost all of her works, the existence of the author and of the narrators is ethically oriented against Creon, i.e. against the system, against the dictatorship. The way in which these life stories are recounted, with many suicidal heroes (defiled, iconically, after their demise, by the agents of repression) or with many unburied dead individuals, suggests the fact that these narratives are intended to become funerary tumuli, crowning, through story-telling, those who were bereft of their burial places. Antigone is not physically, but psychologically and narratively represented. She is the story teller, the one-who-never-forgets-and-lives-on-to-tell these stories, the one endowed with a vivid and relentless lyrical-narrative memory. It is precisely through this lyrical style that Herta Müller draws close to the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy, where characters like Electra and Antigone are not just enclaves of intact memory, performing rituals of remembrance in honor of these heroes (and worshipping a cult of the dead). They also appear as professional wailers and as priestesses who officiate the burial of the dead. Herta Müller has so thoroughly camouflaged, in surrealistic folds, her prose in *The Land of Green Plums* that readers have to dig deep to pull out, from underneath the submerged layers of the book, the core intention of her narrative: the dead who were left unburied (or unhonored) can be buried and honored in and through words, if interment in the ground is prohibited to them. This and the other narratives written by Herta Müller represent a reverential burial ground, endlessly transferred, inherited and passed on to the readers. In her self-acknowledged role as an end-of-the-20th-century Antigone, Herta Müller designs her books as depositions of individual and collective trauma, as narrative testimonials that become graves dug in homage and respectful remembrance of the dead: all the characters who suffered abuses during the communist regime in Romania and whose lives ended prematurely and tragically (through suicide, through brutal investigations that left mental scars or through officially sanctioned assassinations) become the heroes (or the martyrs) who are institutionalized by the writer through this narrative reconstruction, in slow motion, of their memory. Antigone is not only a professional wailer, but also a

guardian of memory, the Parca of a negative history (the communist period in Romania), whose physically, mentally and morally destructive effects on humanity are thus retrieved from the mists of oblivion.

The Land of Green Plums also contains an introduction to what fear meant under Ceausescu's regime. Fear could be collective: its Pavlovian impact was felt at the institutional level. Among the people, it sometimes caused compensatory phantasms or delirium which projected the secretly coveted disappearance of the tyrant: "Everyone could feel the dictator's corpse, like his own wretched life, creeping through his skull. Everyone wanted to outlive him."¹⁸ Personal fear, though, had manifold layers: first, it found its way to the head, then it moved to the voice, and then it left the body, creeping into objects, contaminating everything. Individual fear was contingent on continuous surveillance and, above all, on the demand that the subversives and the rebels present themselves for interrogations. Major Albu from *The Appointment* was anticipated by Captain Piele in *The Land of Green Plums* and his sadistic delights as an investigator. Herta Müller's novel traces, in its profound undertones, the buried history of these interrogations, whose purpose was the dissemination of fear. Both investigators are "kings that kill," a metaphor that the author explains in detail in *The King Bows and Kills*. They have, predictably, discretionary powers, but the terror they instate derives from the fact that they act like masters who have a propensity for dominating the others. The "little king" (the investigator or, sometimes, the father) is always outranked by a "big king" (the dictator), who has a Saturnine, devouring presence.¹⁹

Sometimes, however, those who aggrieve the subversives are not necessarily the members of the repressive apparatus (although their implacable role is, indeed, decisive), but the victims' informant friends, in this case, Tereza, whose cancerous tumor underneath her armpit serves as a walnut of desertion, of betrayal. Symbolically speaking, the character Tereza dies not because she is fatally ill with cancer, but because she handed over information about Antigone to the authorities, to Creon (the Security). Tereza is a guilt-ridden (and not just a vulnerable) Ismena: she is culpable because she is loved by Antigone, whom she unethically abandons. We can also see the victims' heads as "walnuts:" some heads fall, others are crushed, yet others remain strong and will not crack. This is just another way of saying that life is different and nuanced and that, as Herta Müller's moral conception suggests, people will engage or refuse to engage in betrayal, each according to their own powers, their will and their capacity to endure and withstand the assault of Power.

The issue of fear is also addressed in *The King Bows and Kills*. Here, the author provides a typology of such kings, as evinced by the quotation below, which seems to belong to a clinician or to a would-be anatomist of fear. "Perhaps we should distinguish between two entirely different types of fear: *short*, unexpected fear, which evaporates without a trace when its cause has vanished, and *long* fear, the kind you get to know full well and that only surprises you through the unforeseeable, perpetually changing means through which it is activated. In the case of political persecution, we can speak about *long* fear, a fear that becomes part of you, nesting in every instant, spreading salaciously and attending everything that you can imagine."²⁰

Despite fear, Antigone—the key heroine of Herta Müller's prose—undertakes a huge, twofold effort in the three books that serve as the corpus of narratives analyzed in this

essay (these texts are assembled not chronologically, but according to the concentration of terror and the manner in which it is addressed: *The Appointment*, *The Land of Green Plums* and *The King Bows and Kills*: 1. to bury with ethical (and narrative) honors those who died a tragic death (suicidal individuals terrorized by the dictatorial system or people who were *de facto* eliminated by the communist regime in Romania, either as a result of their ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities or by being assassinated by the Security or other extensions of the repressive apparatus) and 2. to commemorate the lives of these martyrs for the edification of the others and, especially, for the heroine's own moral resistance. The justification runs as follows: as long as she can obstinately commemorate them in an attempt to do justice to them, she will not yield in the face of pressures and will maintain her inner and outer ethical outlook. That explains why a series of important characters in her books are granted distinctively ethical funerals: Georg and Kurt, Lola and Tereza (even the latter, a treacherous friend, is allowed to have special funerals). There is a terrifying scene, narrated in *The King Bows and Kills*, which reveals the author's reverential gesture of funerary homage to these individuals: at one point, in the cemetery of the poor in Timișoara, the heroine comes across the abandoned corpse of a drowned woman. This was not, however, just another victim of drowning, but a woman who had been forced to drown, presumably by the members of the repressive system, for she had barbed wire around her ankles and wrists. What was the funerary gesture Herta Müller adopted towards the murdered woman? This time, the scene no longer belongs to a book of fiction or to a fictionalized reality, but to brutal, undistorted reality, because the scene is described in a book of confessional essays. Herta Müller placed cherries in the sockets of the drowned woman's melted eyes. Her gesture, surreal at first glance, was in fact, a funerary homage to the perished, slain woman.

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WHY ARE there so many objects in Herta Müller's prose? It is as if the author wanted to mediate and filter her discursive approach to people through objects. Factuality urges the writer to focus on immovable elements, which can nonetheless become substitutes for mobile syntagms and contexts. In Herta Müller's narratives, objects become substitutes for human emotions, sentiments and mental states. They often refer to a state of traumatized humanity; under the dictatorship, man has become an inanimate object, resembling paralyzed, petrified, rigid, scarred matter. Speaking about unsettling emotional states through objects demands less personal involvement and defends the self from the encroachments of others. Objects are described in ritualistic manner: they are usually household objects or "totemic" objects, invested with psychic power because they contain the psychic energies of various human beings.²¹ It is no longer necessary to depict humans if you can describe the objects that have assimilated human matter. Objects can thus become psychic mediators between human beings and the world. They become interconnecting mental bridges that can be erected but also destroyed at any time. When human beings await anxiously their interrogation, all sorts of objects are described. They are part of the script of disquietude and anxiety against which a protective shield is sought. At the same time, however, these objects contain stories about the life or the

death of human beings. Objects enable posthumous reminiscences, which may always prove their usefulness, for instance, in psychopompous rituals. Herta Müller considers that objects evoke images of people and emblems of their survival. They are part of Antigone's memory: as a symbolical Moira, she recalls not just the victims and the oppressors they were terrorized by, but also the objects that outlived these victims or the objects that were used by their oppressors. There are myriad objects with ethical or non-ethical overtones in Herta Müller's works. They become, through a noticeable transfer, objects of memory (usually related to trauma, but also to resistance and obstinate survival). Antigone needs to see them under a magnifying glass, to describe them in thorough detail, to test them, to exploit their symbols, to decipher and re-encode them (depending on their psycho-ethical purpose), because objects are placed in tombs as tokens of remembrance for those who have passed away. Their function is psychopompous or punitive, but they can also represent the emotional pillars of survival in a totalitarian regime.

Marius Conkan has detected the "writer's visionary impulse to perforate the shell of objects and to extract from them a geography of fear," because objects form "a mechanism for shaping the imaginary, characters and objects interfering and contaminating one another to such an extent that fear itself becomes a protagonist"²² in her fiction. Herta Müller's antitotalitarian thematic mannerisms and her obsession with language have outlined objects as the crucial semiotic elements that can unravel not only the apparatus of terror, but also the mechanisms of survival (and protection) against it.

Translated into English by CARMEN-VERONICA BORBELY



Notes

1. Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern. A History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 37.
2. Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, 38.
3. For all the references to McHale, see Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.
4. Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 12.
5. Herta Müller, *Astăzi mai bine nu m-aș fi întâlnit cu mine însămi*, trans. Corina Bernic (București: Editura Humanitas, 2014).
6. Herta Müller, *Regele se-nclină și ucide*, trans. and notes by Alexandru Al. Șahighian (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005).
7. Vladimir Bukovski, *Și se întoarce vântul*, trans. from Russian and notes by Dumitru Bălan (București: Fundația Academia Civică, 2002).
8. N. Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1991), 7-8.
9. Cosmin Dragoste, *Herta Müller – metamorfozele terorii*, Preface by Dieter Schlesak (Craiova: Editura Aius PrintEd, 2007), 18 and 260.
10. Dana Bizuleanu, *Fotografii și carcase ale morții în proza Hertei Müller* (București: Editura Tracus Arte, 2014).

11. Radu Pavel Gheorghiuță, *Străin în țară străină. Literatura română și granița identității în proza Hertei Müller și a lui Andrei Codrescu*, PhD Thesis (West University of Timișoara, defended on 2 December 2014), 162 and 181.
12. Gheorghiuță, *Străin în țară străină*, 171.
13. Bizuleanu, *Fotografia și carcasa*, 93.
14. Dragoste, *Herta Müller*, 202-203.
15. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Pavilionul canceroșilor*, trans. Eugen Uricariu and Maria Dinescu (București: Editura Univers, 2009).
16. Dana Bizuleanu embarks on a micro-monographic approach to the symbol of the walnut in her book *Fotografia și carcasa ale morții în proza Hertei Müller*.
17. Herta Müller, *Animalul inimii*, trans. Nora Iuga, 2nd edition (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2006), 63.
18. Herta Müller, *The Land of Green Plums*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: Picador, 2009), 62.
19. See also Cosmin Dragoste's analysis in *Herta Müller*, 264-265.
20. Herta Müller, *Regele se-nclină și ucide*, 212.
21. In their books on Herta Müller's prose, both Cosmin Dragoste and Dana Bizuleanu provide detailed analyses of such objects, invested with talismanic or punitive functions.
22. Marius Conkan, "Herta Müller și trauma ca tramă," in *Steaua* (3-4: 2010), 4.

Abstract

Herta Müller – Antigone Changes Trauma into Memory (On Fear and Ethical Graves)

Herta Müller is a novelist and short-story writer who has strategically positioned herself between modernism and postmodernism. As an author, Müller has purposely created her own inimitable and, at the same time, recognizable narrative style. The themes of her works – obsessively, contrapuntally reiterated – revolve around the traumas associated with the oppressive communist system and the abuses perpetrated by the Security. Over and over again, in all of her writings, the strands of this theme are woven together, in concentrated form, and then, out of an exorcising impulse, they are fractured, disjointed, pulverized and endlessly disseminated. Just like her characters, who are locked in the perpetual work of memory, the author adopts the role of an Antigone who, by writing and testifying about fear during the Ceaușescu regime, digs ethical, unforgettable graves to the victims of recent history, in and through her fiction.

Keywords

Herta Müller, communist regime, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Security, terror, fear, trauma, ethical graves, Antigone, memory