The German Shakespeare

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Abstract
Over The past four hundred years, Shakespeare has played a significant role within a European framework, particularly, where a series of political events and ideologies were being shaped. The birth of the nation during the late 18th and 19th centuries, the first and second world wars, the process of European unification during the 1990s, are a case in point. This part challenges the idea of an all-encompassing universal Shakespeare by demonstrating that Shakespeare and his plays transmitted across different histories, languages, and traditions meant something significantly different in these geographical contexts. Rejecting the existence of a universally absolute and singular Shakespearean meaning, I attempt to demonstrate that Shakespeare is always what he is imagined to be in a cultural and historical context. The various local and national appropriations and the universality of the cultural icon, "Shakespeare", clash in the daily practice of interpreting, performing, and teaching his plays. This paper discusses Shakespeare's appropriation and performance in East Germany. It focuses on the theatrical production and its cultural context in this country.

Keywords: Shakespeare, East Germany, Appropriation, Performance, Context.

In Berlin, the presence of Shakespeare's plays was particularly dominant during the first years of the Nazi period, but he was a popular author during the war as well. In Germany, Shakespeare has been identified with national aspirations, the creation of national literary canon, and the mythology of a German national literature. He shares the fate of the German nation, from that Hamlet-like condition before German unification to the dismemberment after 1945 of the Reich created in 1871. Germans in both parts of the once divided nation had all along been using the same text for their theatrical performances and their reading of Shakespeare. The great "classic translation by August Wilhelm Schlegel, itself a living proof to many on this side of the channel including Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb" attest to the fact that, "Shakespeare legitimately achieved the status of a timeless German classic" (Habicht, 1995, P. 3).

From the beginning of the Weimar Republic in 1919 to the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), seventy years later, the German theatre was caught up in and often self-confidently raised its voice in the political discourse. For almost 150 years since the unique Schlegel translations at the turn of the 18th century, Shakespeare had been regarded as a German author (Marston, 1999, P. 132). The intense preoccupation with Shakespeare of practically all German writers, the classical and the Romantic movements had turned him into a landmark in German intellectual history. During the course of the 19th century, his plays had found increasing acceptance of the German stage and were by now the most performed of all dramatists, German or foreign. By the 20th century, Shakespeare was an established fact in the German cultural history on many levels of German cultural life. Marston (1999) added that:

> It is against this background of Shakespeare's undoubted significance to Germany's cultural identity that the argument about his acceptability for a theatre at war has to be seen by the chauvinists whose customary greeting "*Golt Strafe England!*" (May God punish the British!) registered the general anger at Albion's perfidy (P. 132).

In Germany, Shakespeare was considered as an icon. Nowhere was he more cherished than in Germany. Nowhere were his works better received and made alive than in this spot of the world. Germans revered Shakespeare and paid tribute to him through the frequent performance of his plays. According to Marston (1999),

> There is no nation, not even the British, which is more entitled to call Shakespeare its own way than Germany. Shakespeare's characters have become part of our world, his soul has become one with ours: and though he was born and buried in England, it is in Germany that he is truly alive (P. 83).

In the collective German memory, Shakespeare was part of the German theatrical repertoire that no other nation would dare to have. Shakespeare, though English of birth, was perceived more as German than English in the eyes of many by Germans.

> And above all Shakespeare! He is more frequently performed in Germany during a single year than during a whole decade in his native country. And, what is more important, he is incomparably better performed than over there. *Our* Shakespeare! Thus, we may call him, even if he happened to be born in England by mistake. Thus we may call him by right of spiritual conquest. And should we succeed in vanquishing England in the field, we should, I think, insert a clause into the peace treaty stipulating the formal surrender of William Shakespeare to Germany (Wilson, 2000, P. 89).

The German theatre does not only, in Hamlet's words, "show the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure" (III.2.22-23), it also, in Schiller's words, functions as "the nation's moral academy" (Puttenham, 2005, P. 154). The German theatre entered the political arena of the 20th century during war time. Under the impact of the great traumatic blows to German identity, theatre and politics were locked in a close and usually antagonistic relationship. Shakespeare was at the heart of the struggle. His significance for the development of German literature and intellectual life in the 18th and 19th centuries is well known. In the 20th century, it was the theatre which referred to Shakespeare as ultimate proof and final arbiter. For German directors and dramatists, Shakespeare's work was both "infinite continent and black hole" (Marston, 1999, P. 125). For Bertlolt Brecht and Heiner Muller (1989), Shakespeare was a "creative spur and trauma in one" (53). Muller's conclusion that, "we have not yet come into our own as long as Shakespeare writes our play" hints at German dilemma in theatre and politics (Ibid). At a time when the political landscape of the country was changing rapidly leaving in most people's minds a lasting doubt as to the reality of change, great numbers of people were fashioning themselves anew, creating for themselves different social roles, different associations and even more appropriate personalities. There was an undeniable gain in that the theatre had freed itself of the shadow of the classic. Socialist realism was defined as, "the art of the truth of life comprehended and interpreted by the artist from the point of view of devotion to Leninist party principles" (James, 1973, P. 121).

Muller proved uncompromising to the rigid ideological and aesthetic doctrine of socialist realism and worked to undermine it. In this, as in other dominant 20th century contexts, Shakespeare has been an active political presence resistant to attempts to be turned into an icon. Carried through history by each new generation of directors and audiences to this very day, his theatre has remained a source of hope, inspiration, and challenge. It was in these circumstances that the idea of "nostrification", as coined by Franz Dingelstedt, was born. As early as 1858, Dingelstedt announced that the appropriation of Shakespeare had to be a "common property of the nation" and that Germany was in a position to "nostrify" him completely (Johnson, 2006, P. 249). [1] Derived from the adjective "proprius" meaning "one's own", appropriation can be examined both in its diachronicity and synchronicity A diachronic overview would survey how Shakespeare has been appropriated at different historical times (for example, the Shakespeare of the Restoration, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, etc.,), whereas a synchronic perspective would demonstrate the specific ways and areas in which this appropriation takes place (for instance genres, art forms, different ethnic communities, and ideologies of "recruiting Shakespeare"). Appropriation by other languages and cultures is one of the ways of "nostrification" giving expressions of linking Shakespeare to nation-formation from Eastern and Central European cultures (Croyden, 2002, P. 69).

As "world phenomenon", Shakespeare is nobody's property; to appropriate his work for the stage is an act of cultural assimilation which is demanding in more than one way. First of all, the bard remains in whichever form, "a literary value", as Michael Bristol (1996) notes in his *Big Time Shakespeare,* that any literary value makes sense only on the condition that the worth of literary works is seen in terms of gifts rather than of commodities. And as gifts, "great literary works entail particularly complex and onerous obligations" (P. 144). With these provisions in

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[1] Christa Johnson, German Shakespeare Studies at the Turn of the Twenty First Century (Newark: University of Delware Press, 2006), p. 249.

mind, the concept of "appropriation" entails a sense of *Aneignung*. In other words, aneignunug, connotes more than taking a cultural work for one's own purposes only. Rather, the obligation is to give the work our own, our best, most thoughtful response which concord with our own changing world. During the Nazi regime, for instance, Shakespeare was even used in wartime newspaper cartoon to underline the Reich's cultural credits. Such Nazi appropriation was not a futile one. The Hitler youth sponsored a festival where all the history plays were performed at successive nights. Nothing like that had been attempted before anywhere in the world, as the organisers proudly pointed out. In the major playhouses, too, some of the Reich's most memorable productions were Shakespearean: Werner Krauf's *Richard III*; the rival interpretations by Rudolf Forster and Grundgens as *Richard II*, Grungens, as Hamlet; Heinrich George as Falstaff, or Krauf's infamous Shylock (Wolfganga, 1989, P. 120). Schiller's famous phrase that Shakespeare was a, "moral institution" in the Third Reich reflected all too accurately "Germany's moral collapse" (Ibid) Gergart Hauptmann's address "*Deutschland Und Shakespeare*"[2], or "Germany and Shakespeare" of 1915, elucidates some degree of identification with Shakespeare's hero, Hamlet that few other cultures would dare to imitate (Delabastita, 2008, P. 270). There is something in the German political landscape that makes the figure of Shakespeare, and of Hamlet in particular, adequate as a national symbol. Under the exceptional conditions in the Germany of the twenties, it was imperative for all the arts to relate to the present.

Most artists felt that there was no going back to the worn out formula that overtook Europe of the WWI. In fact, developing new means of expression and helping to construct a contemporary ethos were part of the process.[3] The trend to appropriate Shakespeare to the contemporary climate in politics and art was vehemently cherished. Remembering Goethe's exhortation that every heritage must be reacquired by a deliberate effort, many actors and playwrights needed to repossess Shakespeare as a living heritage. Their inspiration was basically educational: a theatre directed to preserve a classical body of works in a time of flux and sensational re-evaluations. A large section of people favoured this moderately conservative treatment of the classics and supported efforts that went under the name of "*kulturpflege*", or "*Shakespearepflege*", i.e., the devoted cultivation and transmission of a valuable heritage (Marston, P. 162). The politics of Shakespeare appropriation looms as large as in most theatrical productions of Shakespeare in the European countries of the former Soviet bloc. The East German theatre, more often than not, tended to play out a type of cultural politics characterised by a desire to discover something new within and beyond the dominating Marxist analysis of history. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that audiences, as Lawrence Guntner pointedly notes, "came to expect, and party cultural functionaries came to suspect that Shakespeare productions might just contain gift-wrapped critiques of the East-German version of the socialist system" (Guntner and Mc Lean, 1998, P. 3).

The stage came to assume the role of a public forum where cultural ideology, and by extension the socialist claims and problems of the state, could be staged, debated, but also criticized. In some socialist countries in post-war Eastern Europe and especially in East Germany, the dominant politics of reception sought to emphasize the authority of the classical text as best compatible with realism in the theatre *à la Stanislavski*. Here the appropriation of post-war subversive use of Shakespeare's plays mirrored another facet of the new historicist/cultural materialist side, that of containment. In Stephen Greenblatt's words, "Shakespeare's plays are centrally and repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder" (Greenblatt, 1988, P. 40). In what follows, I will apply the theory of containment precisely to that part of the world that has been cited as a prime experience of subversion. In East Germany, *Hamlet* has always been a significant play for Germans in political terms. According to Pfister (1994),

> There has hardly been one important phase in German history which was not discussed in terms of the Hamlet myth or reflected in interpretations and productions of the play. From the 18th century onwards, *Hamlet* in Germany has not been a 'play like any other,' but a screen on which to project the changing constructions of German nation identity […], nor has Shakespeare been a foreign dramatist like any other. His 'nostrification' involved much more than mere translation, interpretations, or idolization; in its fully-fledged form, it meant the claim that Shakespeare is essentially ours, essentially German (P, 176).

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[2] Cited in Drink Delabastita, Josef de Vos, and Paul Franssen, *Shakespeare and European Politics*, eds (Newark: University of Delware Press, 2008), p. 270.

[3] Wolfgang, *Shakespeare in Nazi Germany*, p. 123.

Turning back the wheel of time to the historical turmoil of Berlin in WW II, Pujante and Hoenselaars show, in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, how Shakespeare was seen as a force for social change in the then political chaos of Germany. The frequent staging of *Hamlet* shows how influential Shakespeare was in the cultural rebuilding of a split nation: East and West Germany. However different the motives were in both parts of Germany, Shakespeare was to play an eminent role in the political scene of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In East Germany, theatre was expected to contribute to the establishment of a socialist culture based on a militant and optimistic socialist humanism. Under the strict control of party ideologues, there was no room for an art free from politics. Shakespeare was part of the official GDR culture and was proclaimed as a precursor of socialist realism. In the 20th century, the political use of Shakespeare in Eastern Europe increased sharply. The playwright of the 16th century was used for contemporary political dilemmas and helped define the national values and identity of Germany which remained a second home for him. It is in this sense that Shakespeare's theatre in the 20th century was, first and foremost, *political* fitting the "taste" of the day. In Trevor Nunn's words, it was a, "socially concerned theatre […] an avowed and committed popular theatre" and finally, "a politically aware theatre […] determined to reach beyond the barriers of income" (Holland, 1997, P. 200). In his "German Hamletology and Beyond", Manfred Pfister sought to widen and deepen the notion of the cultural specificity of meaning by showing that Shakespeare, in general, and *Hamlet*, in particular, are embedded in German history particularly as a result of the place it held in German romantic theory. Besides, because of its accounts of national identity, *Hamlet* is actually a different play from that known by English readers and is in close contact with reality (Pfister, P. 200). For that, Hamlet's advice to the players, "to hold as it were the mirror up to nature" (V.2.23), was assumed to be at the heart of Shakespeare's credo and the reception of his work in Germany, and the world over.

In East Germany, a post-modern meditation on *Hamlet* written by East German playwright Heiner Muller in 1977, *Hamletmachine*, written in five Acts like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, was an avant-gardist work and an experimental take on Shakespeare's tragedy. The work addresses diverse issues: some of them are undeniably political dealing with a split Germany coming out of the shadow of world war and, thus, dealing with communism and the 1956 Hungarian revolt while other subjects, included in the production, tackle the issue of feminism and Hamlet's dilemma could not pass unnoticed. Muller made use of *Hamlet* to portray the atrocity of our living with a plot acquiring a universal dimension as it becomes an epitome of Man's suffering and political inaction. Hamlet and Ophelia turn into icons of the failing German revolution and the torment engendered by its inhibition. Most probably, it is this very fall that paved the way to "Germany is Hamlet**" (Hortman, 1984, P. 23).** "Hamlet," Hortmann writes:

> is the longest play in world literature in terms of quantity of text. And we cut almost nothing […] and Hamlet was really the only thing that occurred to me, because I had the feeling this is the most relevant play at the moment in the GDR. (Muller, 1989, P. 41).

Muller's *Hamletmachine* explores the relationship between Shakespeare and East Germany. Shakespeare's reception in Germany in general and in East Germany, in particular, tells the story of how Shakespeare was performed, criticized, and understood within the context of East German social history. East German theatre people, literary historians, audiences, and the ruling Socialist Unity Party always believed that theatre had something to do with politics. Those involved in the theatre felt their work would help to change people as well as society. So the theatre and its approach to staging Shakespeare was defined officially, redefined in performance, and then treated differently later when political conditions changed. What makes this process interesting is that theatre was in a continual state of change despite the fact that the GDR developed more and more into a close society.

Yet, it was precisely this contradiction that provided East German directors, set designers, dramaturges, and performers with the dramatic materials they needed to redefine using Shakespeare performance to comment on the contemporary theatre situation in the GDR. The staging of Shakespeare's plays was, to a large extent, critical of the GDR socialist system. They helped create a political sensibility and raised consciousness among the German people that fostered the 1989 bloodless revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But this focus may also be seen as paradigm for what happened to Shakespeare and other classics, to a certain degree, in other East European socialist societies, (this part will be discussed later). In the GDR, actors and theatre audiences learned to look at Shakespeare's plays in a new way. Critics and playwrights set about rewriting classics in the light of the German political life. Brecht (2002) called the new emerging theatre, "Goring theatre" (P. 47), that is a theatre of prompt

circumstances. Socialists and communists saw this situation as the chance to cut off the horrible twelve years of Nazism. For them, Germany was in the midst of a *zeitenwende*, i.e., a period of time in which the stage would play an important role as a political-pedagogical force, "a weapon and a tool for educating the masses for social change", and Shakespeare was seen as the greatest stimulating force in the development of this tradition into account. This idea was best illustrated through the performance of Shakespeare on stage. Heiner Muller, Brecht's disciple, initiated a new epoch in German staging. Convinced that every historical age requires its own performance; Muller approached Shakespeare's script as a performance material rather than a purely literary text.

Redefinitions of Shakespeare's drama in terms of the contemporary East German cultural politics can be traced in the reworking of Muller's *Hamletmachine* (1977). A radical abbreviation and revision of the play relocates Hamlet, the character and *Hamlet* the play, in a post-modern society where there is no social, moral, or cultural authority. In 1987, two years before the fall of the Berlin wall, Muller had told the German Shakespeare society that, "we have not arrived at our destination as long as Shakespeare is still writing our plays" (P. 124). To arrive at where he was going, Muller deconstructed not only "the socialist national culture", but also tried his hand at deconstructing Shakespeare by demonstrating that hope for any kind of a future for humanity was a chimera for which, like Hamlet, time had simply run out; "No hope, no despair" as Muller deems:

> When I wrote *Hamletmachine*, after translating Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for a theatre in East Berlin, it turned out to be my most American play, quoting T.S Eliot, Andy Warhol, Coca Cola, Ezra Pound, and Susan Atkins. It may be read as a pamphlet against the illusion that one can stay innocent in this our world. (Muller, P. 123)

A dedicated communist, Muller's work was anti-fascist, humanist, and later so critical of the socialist regime in East Germany by recognising the repressive nature of Stalinism during the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Rehearsals for a production combining Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Muller's *Hamletmachine* started at the Deutsche Theatre in East Berlin in September 1989. At that time, the Eastern part of Germany seemed firmly in the grips of an old clan of Stalinist politicians endeavouring to prevent the intrusion of nations of democracy from the West. The opening of the *Hamletmachine* occurred on 24 March 1990. In the meantime, Germany witnessed a sequence of leaders' downfalls, then a succession of new leaders who superseded the older ones, and ultimately the falling of the communist party. Six months later, Germany was reunited. Being aware, at the same time, that such phenomenal historic changes were occurring, Muller was constantly forced to reconsider and readjust his concept of tragedy. However, his *Hamlet* became the Shakespearean production of a doomed society and at the same time a foreboding for humanity. Kalb writes that:

> Packed with quotations and paraphrases from Eliot, Cummings, Marx, Benjamin, Artaud, Sartre, Shakespeare, the Bible, Muller himself, and others often strung together without connecting text. *Hamletmachine* tacitly renounces style but nevertheless acquires something like a style due to the humour and intelligence with which Muller applies the quotations and moulds Shakespeare's characters and other borrowed figures to his purposes. (Kalb, 1998, P. 108).

Hamletmachine may retain the five-act skeleton of Shakespeare's play, may indeed tell a story, but it is the story of a failure. There is no climax, no action, and no dialogue both on the level of motif and the level of structure the play enacts, as Kalb claims, the death of drama or more specifically the failure of traditional dramatic form either to express or to challenge the world. [4] This inadequacy reflects the death of history and the death of drama as Muller puts it, "With my last play, *Hamletmachine*, that's come to an end. No substance for dialogue exists anymore because there is no history." (Ibid). Understood as an allegory, *Hamletmachine* announces the death of history. The text is divided into five sections or acts; each separately titled **"FAMILY SCRAPBOOK".** The opening act anticipates an exhumation of a past history through the most common of domestic archives. Yet, it also hints at a melancholic possibility, for it informs us that we will not see a family but its "scraps". This might also take on its colloquial meaning, a fight or quarrel, making this "book" the fragmented story of struggle, conflict, or catastrophe.

This sense of ongoing failure is further enhanced by *Hamletmachine*'s first line: "*I was Hamlet"* (Fischlin and Fortier, 2000, P. 211). The past tense here not only problematizes the identity of the speaker, but also implies temporally the end of the play. If the speaker *was*, but no longer *is*, the tragedy of *Hamlet* would end its run. The

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[4] Ibid.

next line more than doubles the distance between the Hamlet speaker and this past tragedy, opening an abyss between them, "I stood on the ashore and talked with the surf BLA BLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me" (211). "Ruins" resonates meaningfully, here, becoming a rubric of the piling up of allegorical signs already under way. In "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism", which is perhaps the first fully developed understanding of postmodernist aesthetics as an allegorical mode, Craig Owens claims that what is most 'proper' of allegory is:

> its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear […] A conviction of the remoteness of the past and a desire to redeem it for the present and these are its most fundamental impulses. (Owens, 1984, p. 215)

In Muller's *Hamletmachine*, our historical imagination is compelled back to the post-war remains of a shattered Europe or alternatively forward to some future past in which *Hamlet* and Europe have not only lost their relevance but their being, "Tomorrow morning has been cancelled" (212). For Muller, Europe is today more completely in ruins than Berlin was then. On an aesthetic level, the oppressive regime of the GDR forced Muller to take advantage of allegory's inherent doublespeak thus:

> In many ways, *Hamletmachine* points out to the giving way (by Hamlet, Muller, Shakespeare, Brecht, Europe, men) to the revolutionary project of presently oppressed groups who hold the future in their hands. Stylistically and politically, *Hamletmachine* submits Shakespeare's play to dismemberment and a radical influx of myriad historical forces and *allusions*. (Fisclin and Fortier, 2000, P. 210).

After some of his earliest plays were banned, Muller began coding multiple levels of meaning into his work; a technique easily decoded by the GDR audiences. Ironically, however, after he made his allegorical turn in his work, Muller's plays began to gain enormous popularity in the West, a phenomenon that reached its zenith in Muller's *Hamletmachine*. Kalb (1999) notes that: "The work won a place as a *modern classic* even before it was produced" (P. 121). Although the entire text might be conceived as Muller's own monodrama, his self-critique of the intellectual is most clearly apparent in the Hamlet monologues of Acts I and IV. The second sentence of the first monologue stands out as a concise summation of the general nature of intellectual crisis, "I stood at the shore and talked with the surf *BLA BLA*, the ruins of Europe in back of me" (211). The image is striking, the "I", who was Hamlet, speaks but to a vast extent of nothingness and says nothing. The ruins of the Western world invite us to complete the story by assuming that while Europe burned, Hamlet babbled. This gets the essence of the intellectual dilemma of self-doubt present in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Muller changes the ending, introducing a poem by Zbigniew Herbert called, "Fortinbras' Lament", which includes the words, "this or any other way you were bound to fall, Hamlet you were not fit for life, you believed in crystalline concepts and not in human clay." (Rogoff, 1986, P. 54)

Muller's production offered a comment on the historical attitude of the day, and Muller's staging is a reflection of his sombre view that history has become disjointed and senseless. The performance takes seven and a half hours. Spatial architecture and vast cycloramas are fused; one of the most prominent features is a massive concrete shelter. The lapse of time is a decisive feature in Muller's staging. The enigma of *Hamlet* arises in part from the fact that historical time intruded into the dramatic time when the play was written argues Muller, "Time has run away from Hamlet, as it has from a whole social era. Life punishes those who come too late, said Gorbatchov. We all come too late says this *Hamletmachine"* (Muller, 1989, P.12). Ulrich Muhe's Hamlet (the actor playing Hamlet) is a slim, sensitive youngster wearing a double-breasted black suit too large for him. Already the black coat forebodes a tragic end, "Something is rotten in the age of hope," (214) Hamlet says in *Hamletmachine.* In the latter,

> He never grows up to fill the suit, just as he is never willing to accept the political responsibility thrust upon them. He is burdened by the curse of thought. He is the man of Enlightenment who cannot deal with the harsh call to action: his failure is his intellectual paralysis in the face of the need to act. Hamlet is similarly paralyzed by his own position of privilege: he sees himself both inside the palace and down with the revolutionaries in the street-a position with which Muller, as renowned author identifies (Fischer and Fortier, 1989, P. 209).

In *Hamletmachine,* Horatio is depicted as an ageless intellectual with a pale face who observes all the events from the edge. One who diffuses burning events through a throat microphone, one who is convinced of his

own feebleness in view of the power politics around and who, in the end, reacts to the destruction of his world with mocking laughter. Hamlet, in this production, is made to traverse the history of the earth from Ice Age to Heat Death. Taking his cue from Francisco's lines, 'Tis bitter cold, /And I am sick at heart,' Muller sets the beginning of the play, in a stage-high cube-to represent an enormous block of ice, whose melting produces a constant trickle of water and a pool in the middle of the stage. On a more personal plane, the production depicts the conflict individuals have to face when they get involved in political turmoil. Contemporary events are alluded to via the characters' moves and sound effects. Thus, when the ghost appears on the stage, we hear a muted recording of the funeral ceremony at Stalin's death; the "Little Father who is still haunting the realm, redirecting the murderous actions of coming generations" (217). Besides, in the *ACTOR* scene, the section begins with the entrance of three naked women embodied in the political personalities of Marx, Lenin, and Mao and together they quote Marx, *"THE MAIN POINT IS TO OVERTHROW ALL EXISTING CONDITIONS" (*211).

In contrast to Hamlet's patriarchal and authoritarian regression, it is Ophelia who emerges as the revolutionary "Other". Ophelia represents, "all the aspects of life which are necessarily and systematically suppressed to allow the imposition and maintenance of that order", writes Arlene Teraoka, "She is the force held captive in the asylums of the Enlightenment state". (Teraoka, 1985, P. 122). Contrary to Hamlet's egocentric romanticization, Ophelia's heart is cold, hard, and mechanical. Unlike Hamlet, Ophelia shows no signs of bifurcated identity announcing clearly, "I am Ophelia. The one river didn't keep. The woman dangling from the rope. The woman with her arteries cut open. The woman with the overdose. *SNOW ON HER LIPS*. The woman with her head in the gas stove" (212). Ophelia has emerged from historical oblivion, she embodies the coming back of the repressed in a newly physical form, the embodiment of all women forced to succumb to the "impurities and depredations of patriarchy". (Ibid). Her heart/clock has been marking time throughout not "killing time" like the Hamlet figure, but keeping time until it becomes an explosive force. For Ophelia, that time is now as the present tense that her monologue indicates, "I smash the tools of my captivity, the chair, the table, the bed. I destroy the battlefield that was my home. I fling open the doors so the wind gets in and the scream of the world" (212). Through a reading of the silencing of Ophelia and Hamlet's schizophrenic experience, we come to understand Muller's critique of the intellectual and his despair in a postmodern age. Muller's Ophelia is not crippled by madness, nor does she commit suicide. This is the woman whose despair at the loss of a lover and the death of her father does not lead to insanity at the end of her life:

> I stopped killing myself […] 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 threw my clothes into the fire. I wrench the clock that was my heart. I walk into the street clothed in my blood (212).

Near the end of *Hamletmachine*, Ophelia takes on the role of the avenging Electra. No longer willing to accept the river as her end, she becomes a terrorist Squeaky Fomme , whose words she speaks. She is the revolutionary who has nothing to lose, not even her life, since it has been taken from her and abused by men. Ophelia's story is very different in *Hamletmachine*. It tells the violent necessity of change. Muller locates the potential for radical action in the lives of those most persistently oppressed and dispossessed. In *Hamlet*, this person is Ophelia. But Muller seems to be pessimistic at the end of the play; there are two men in white smocks who wrap the body of Ophelia. From the modernist perspective, the body is an object that can never be adequately contained by language. The body always exceeds the parameters of anyone discourse. In postmodernism, as defined by Kroker and Crook, the body is not a biological organism, but an entity only in the discourse and the context in which it is conceptualized as it is made clear by Lewis (2005),

> The body is a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural excess on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire, broken into at will by the ideological interpellation of the subject and all the while, held together as a fictive concrete unity by the illusion of misrecognition.[5]

The wrapping of Ophelia, the binding of the voice, of the other, is an extremely powerful image and a metaphor for the predominant response of those in power to the threat of radical change. It is this point of resistance that Muller critiques so rigorously in his play; recognition of the need for change does not necessarily mean a

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[5] Richard Lewis, Postmodernism: A Critical Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), P. 75.

willingness to change. Hamlet's position within *Hamletmachine* can be understood as a conflict between his hesitation to change and the recognition of the urgent need for change. The romantic dream of overthrowing the father/state is illustrated by the appearance of two men in white smocks binding the voice of Ophelia whose breasts, thighs, and lap have become instruments of destruction. This is not Hamlet who binds the voice of Ophelia, but Heiner Muller: "two men dressed in surgeon's gowns wrap muslin all around her and the wheelchair from the bottom of the top. Here speaks Electra" (214). Here, Ophelia announces a total break with the past, an absolute discontinuity. Her message is aimed at the "metropolitis of the world", at industrial society. She speaks in the name of the victims-the women, the exploited masses, the suppressed peoples of the Third world.

> 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 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 bury it in my womb. Down with 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 (P. 75).

The wrapping of Ophelia does more than silence her voice, it insists upon her absolute otherness; it defines the boundaries of her subjectivity. Yet, the final image is one of the most memorable. The original purpose of Egyptian mummification was not simply to dispose of the body but to preserve it as a vessel for the life to come. So while millennia may pass, utopian hope remains in Ophelia and the history written on her body, is a corporal inscription of its own potential. This is the story of an avant-gardist play, "projecting the story of Hamlet into the 20th century, when the socialist dreams of several European generations are dashed by cruelty and terror: "something is rotten in this Age of Hope" (214).

> The totally disillusioned actor Hamlet refuses to play anymore roles and during an anti-communist insurrection, is swayed by divided loyalties between the rebels and the defenders of the state. He wants to become a machine without pain and thought […] Ophelia, after her metamorphosis from an aggressive anarchist into a whore performing striptease, is lashed to a wheelchair in the final scene […] declares her intention to reject the world Shakespeare had given birth to, invoking 'hatred, contempt, rebellion, death'. In the world where machines have taken control of human beings, violence breaks out as a spasm of oppressed humanity. (Stribrny, 2000, P. 138).

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