

Historical and political attributions in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*

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ABSTRACT

Müller's *Hamletmachine* offers a descriptive look on the Marxist establishment in Germany after World War II, and the historical activation with a reference. *Hamletmachine* tackles the text of Hamlet as an expression to social emancipation against political agendas. Through the process of recreation, Müller expands in narrating and applying valuable events that overlies with resonances to political and social realities. As a personal experience, Müller affirms his ideology as a dramatic impact for expressing a self-journey that enhances a sense of contumacy against an authoritative environment.

Keywords: Hamletmachine, Politics, history, Communism, German society.

السمات التاريخية والسياسية في مسرحية هاملتمشين ميولر

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الملخص

في مسرحية هاملتمشين ميولر عرض نظرة وصفية على تأسيس الماركسية و النشاط التاريخي في المانيا بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. هاملتمشين تتناول نص هاملت ل ويليام شكسبير كتعبير عن التحرر الاجتماعي ضد الاجندات السياسية. من خلال عملية اعادة الصياغة، ميولر وسع في سرد و تطبيق الاحداث القيمة التي علت على الاصداء السياسية و الوقائع الاجتماعية. كتجربة شخصية، ميولر اكد على عقيدته كتأثير درامي للتعبير عن الرحلة الروحية التي تزيد من قيمة الاحساس بالتمرد ضد البيئة السلطوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هاملت ماشين ، السياسة ، التاريخ ، الشيوعية ، المجتمع الألماني

1.Heiner Müller

Heiner Müller (1929-1995) was a German dramatist, poet, writer and theatre director. He was born in Eddendorf, Saxony in Germany to a mine-worker father. The influence of the Nazi regime imprisoned his father and let the family with the custody of their grandparents'. This personal experience of watching his father arrested and then interned in a concentration camp, drafts Müller into overwhelming disruption. For this, Müller tries to repress these occurrences of his life in his writings. He participates in developing a German intellectual theatre that reflects his initiation of stable democratic course in Germany. His literary target is to allow spectators/readers access the repressed and forgotten memories and to enable them to coproduce the spectacle through a collective historical wound. (Kalb, 2001, p.5-6)

He joined the GDR (German Democratic Republic) to establish a critical movement for the state of dictatorship. Müller's attitude towards GDR was as complex as his reception. The cynicism of his theatre is pervasive, devoid of any optimism. However, GDR ban most of his works for considering them as examples of extravagant bourgeois art that failed to conform to the GDR's aesthetic and ideological beliefs. His literary texts confound GDR policy because they contain too much reality that it portrays life in the Communist state. Müller risks too far to handle the daily issues which are circulated between all society members. He uses his theatre to elucidate the role of emancipation from social orders in which man is involved to obey and imitate. Müller's theatre creates a world of images and dimensions in which that the spectators/readers absorb and critically respond to the structure and meaning of performance. Thus, Müller tries to affect spectators/readers by producing a dialectical performance that raises social and individual relations toward the historical and political aspects. (Ganter, 2008, pp.13)

With his density of images and literary references, Müller pictures German history by exploring its development through the contemporary era, basically with reference to the foundation of GDR. He uses his personal experience to convey the events in the period during and after World War II. By this, Müller's drama describes a social view under the Communist state by providing a vivid interpretation of German history under the fascist dictatorship, and capitalism. (Ganter, 2008, pp.3-4)

Müller focuses on the theatrical impressions to produce German literature from a political and historical perspective. He prepares a drama of no border for what he dramatically realigns the political and historical orders. Through an overview of his literary writing, Müller presents multiple views simultaneously to force spectators/readers to re-experience their knowledge and imagination of certain ideological beliefs. Furthermore, Müller's drama is not geared towards any type of staging or interpretation, but instead offers dense passages that challenge the influence of history in Western civilization and especially in Germany. (Ganter, 2008, p.15)

Müller makes clear attitudes to quip a theatre with fundamental importance of dramaturgy. His plays have been a subject to amount of structuralist criticism. They direct against the imitated progression of radical political contents. For this, Müller's plays, such as his Hamletmachine, take for granted to discuss his literary concept of German history like his political and aesthetic ideologies which are considered as a key element to the playwright's work. Müller's dramaturgy pictures theatre in its synthetic fragments to reevaluate a new perspective into contemporary socio-political conditions. (Calandra, 1983, p.177)

Müller provides a theatrical energy to revitalize the German socialist realism through a manner in which it allows society to show itself. In this sense, Müller grants to carry the socialist consequences of his writing that express society through individual manifestation. According to his dramatic work, Müller seeks to lay theatrical examination of many fundamental problems that occupy German history such as the Nazi occupation and the personal burden of political power to repress and annihilate (Calandra, 1983, pp.118)

Müller's theatrical writing involves the concept of adaptation as an adjustment for the social environment. According to his adaptation, Müller uses his literary viewpoint to respond to German society in conforming individual's norms and attitudes. Müller's concept of adaptations tends to engage a comprehensible investigation from different geographical and historical aspects. In this sense, Müller presents his theatre as a dramatic representation to embrace the use of "projections" of history that highlights present issues such as wars, revolutions, self-destruction ...etc. Müller tends to shatter the relationship between the present society and the past events to complicate the substitution between contemporary figures and historical ones through a fracturing of voices and use of pastiche. (Calandra, 1983, pp.118-119)

2.The Background of *Hamletmachine*

Hamletmachine (1977) is a postmodern play by Heiner Müller in which he produces a transformation of William Shakespeare's Hamlet into *Hamletmachine* to destroy its contemplative, narrative and metalanguage implications. *Hamletmachine* consists of five scenes of varying length in eleven pages only. These scenes aim to disrupt the naturalist readings and renderings of Hamlet into a German imagination. *Hamletmachine* is inevitably a search for narrative and meaning which try to find definitive answers about this Shakespeare's open text. *Hamletmachine* has been considered as a theatrical end game and as Müller's most enigmatic and crisis play. (Kalb, 2016, pp.49) *Hamletmachine* conveys the role of Hamlet as a cultivated man who confronts his history that is shown as dismembered and fractured into pieces with mere illusions of time and space. Müller provides *Hamletmachine* as a summation to open multiple identities of Hamlet and to explore the post-modern dilemma for the writer, spectators, and readers .

Müller toys with the language of the *Hamletmachine* by using synthetic fragments from many authors such as Walter Benjamin, E.E. Cummings, T.S. Eliot, and William Shakespeare. (Kalb, 1993, p.50) The use of these fragments and the inclusion of Hamlet as the representative of the playwright's privileged subject position leads Muller to refer to the text as "self critique of the intellectual's position".(Calandra, 1983, p.128)

The title of *Hamletmachine* has been immensely influential amongst other theatre texts. Müller finished the play while he was in Sofia, Bulgaria. The play took place in Theatre Gerard Philip Saint-Denis, and it directed by Jean Jourdeuil in 1979. In Germany, specifically, the play has not been performed until it renounced itself as a play within a play at the Deutsches Theatre, Berlin (1990-1993). Müller's *Hamletmachine* has been considered as a reflection of Theatre of Cruelty not only in its thematic sense or event trajectory, but also in its body of movements. The text of *Hamletmachine* gives Müller a reason to demonstrate his state by underpinning his forebears to track the literary aestheticism and help establishing a long going career that hit Müller's main writerly strategy from the 1970s on. (Kalb, 1998, p.48-49)

Hamletmachine employs a matching picture for the writer himself. Müller attempts to rescue an emancipator function for theatre in a post-socialist society that tends towards the obliteration of history. For this, *Hamletmachine* traces Müller's formulation of a new concept towards a significant change in the fate of German politics and theatre. Müller suggests his presence as a dramaturg and a writer who can help manipulating significant accounts and demolishing conventional methods that tie the dramatic inspiration. He produces *Hamletmachine* along with Shakespeare's Hamlet to challenge the role of western intellectual in the society and comments on the ongoing and oppressive presence of history in the present. The play provides a constant cycle of history that results from the cycle of inescapable violence in which characters are caught between a desire for action and the inability to act. For this, Müller uses a dramaturgical aspect for adaptation to present a new, yet essential, dramatic arena that maximizes Shakespeare's theatre beyond German and English literature alike. (Weber, 1978, p.16)

The aim of writing *Hamletmachine* provides a purposeful note for the playwright himself. According to Müller, *Hamletmachine* is the most hypotext of Shakespeare's Hamlet that involves a playful appropriation of his aesthetics and dramatic presentation. Müller fascinates with the process of dramatic presentation in which he reduces the text of Hamlet into another kind of performance. As *Hamletmachine* is an extremely adaptable text, it tackles the process of adaptation to strip Hamlet's fascination by initiating a performative activity of thinking. (Kalb, 1998, pp.51)

3.The historical and political points

Although this short work of *Hamletmachine* handles many topics like feminism, environmental disaster, globalization, etc, it primarily focuses on political interpretation. Müller uses Hamlet as a myth to subvert the German experience of Hitler regime, World War II, the construction of Berlin Wall and certain domestic politics. *Hamletmachine* as a title indicates that Hamlet is being

used as a machine for he refuse to think or act. The background of *Hamletmachine* is a history of communism (Marx, Lenin, Mao) that is represented by the image of naked woman who tries to smash Hamlet with an ax and creates a new myth, as in the following: "He steps into the armor, splits the heads of Marx Lenin Mao with The axe. Snow. Ice age. (Muller, 1977, pp. 58) *Hamletmachine* is a condensed list of Western civilization's evolution from classical epoch to a contemporary time and to a dystopian future of a climate disaster. (Kolpakova, et al, 2019, P.317)

Müller reflects his aim of *Hamletmachine* as a performance. He creates a stage that is able to show human consciousness and disillusionment through characters' performance. For this *Hamletmachine* is performed as a dramaturgical movement to show the significant issues that interest audience and readers, whether socially, politically, or psychologically. *Hamletmachine* reflects Müller's dramaturgy of self-reflexivness by deliberating his experiences through historical and political coordinates. Müller elaborate this experience on stage to stimulate the characters to present significance and existence through manifesting an effective dramatic embodiment.

Hamletmachine, from its regarded tendency, is an experiment on the possibility of ironic theater. It can be understood that *Hamletmachine* affirms the forms of estrangement but without tracing the tragedy and alienation. Muller obliges himself to show the negativity of self –resigning as a technique to enhance negativity to the point of self-extinction. As a distinctive feature of his dramatic literature, Muller reveals the concomitant disintegration of the personal and political identities that rubs throughout German history. Since the ideology of history has an impact on Muller's dramatic career, internal violence, temporal discontinuities, and dramatic fragments convey intense physicality display and mechanical landscapes.

Hamletmachine represents production history that swings between official success and official denunciation. As a result, Müller's personal history within a communist environment provides him with a sophistication of communist thought denied to writers of a similar political persuasion who reside in capitalist countries. His concept of the political play is similarly sophisticated, immersed as he is in the GDR Brechtian tradition. What seems to be Müller's criticism of communism is often a criticism of Soviet communism. Müller regards communism as a German philosophy as well as a German pre-war practice. In *Hamletmachine*, Muller regards the continuation of the tradition of German political dramaturgy. He rejects the form of organization , the Utopian sense of goal and the drama of social realities .

Hamletmachine confirms, in its analyses, the history of European communism. Müller intends to present the image of death and horror that

dominated the Europe out of communism and he wishes to take advantage of purifying his readers and viewers with the moral concept and the laws that destroy it for stating materialistic principles. Müller produces Hamlet as a witness for the calamity of horror and exploitation and he, through Hamlet, is able to reorganize the aftermath and transferring a real picture of German life. (Kolpakova , et al. 2019 , P. 317)

The historical and political aspects in *Hamletmachine* are Muller's perception of the effect of horror and by his proficiency he was able to show rather than tell his text. By his dramaturgical innovation, Müller activates the identity loss which signifies the psychological war inside Hamlet the actor . This war leads him to shatter words rather than takes actions and this insinuates the illusion of paranoia and eventually ends with the downfall of Western civilization. Müller promotes his interest in European society by analyzing social ills and present them critically and effectively. The manifestation of political and historical aspects in *Hamletmachine* is a progress for Brechtian oppression which gives the movement of action clues beyond the theatrical obligations. (Listeo , 2004 , p. 102-103)

Conclusion

Hamletmachine provides an in-depth analysis of Shakespeare's Hamlet as a link to its political history. The dramatic contributions in *Hamletmachine* circulate between the society members and their expressing method of freedom. It symbolizes Hamlet as a revolution, a Marxist character who indicates a social identity crisis as a result of political disasters. *Hamletmachine* expresses a relationship between man and his society through an opposing nature that raises a number of challenges and criticisms. Furthermore, *Hamletmachine* develops Müller's examination for society through a particular relationship between the singularity and finitude. In this sense, *Hamletmachine* reflects Müller's theatre that is made and written for a heterogeneous community interpreted as criticism of Stalinist regime and Marxist concept.

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