

The Critical Reception of Herta Müller in the
German and English Printed Media Before and After
the Nobel Prize for Literature 2009

by

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ABSTRACT

After being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009, Herta Müller attained great prominence around the world. Commentators, especially in English-speaking countries, seemed shocked by the decision. One of the primary concerns was that Müller was relatively unknown. This thesis seeks to address this and other concerns by looking at reviews of her works in German- and English-language publications both before and after the Nobel Prize was awarded. This thesis analyses chronologically the reception of her books beginning with *Niederungen* in 1982 and ending with the reception of her novel *Atemschaukel* in 2009. It compares the reception of the original German text to that of the English translation; therefore only works which have been translated and published in English are discussed. The study also shows that while Müller's work did not top the bestseller charts, at least before the Nobel Prize, she was hardly the completely unknown author that some in the English-language media believed. This thesis seeks to present trends in the reception as well as provide a basis for further study of the reception of Herta Müller.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Nobel Prize Committee awarded the prize for literature to Romanian-born German author Herta Müller. Around the world, literature critics reacted to the decision, with many expressing surprise that someone so “unknown” could win the most prestigious prize in literature. Even in Germany, where Müller has won many literary awards, critics stated that the decision was surprising. The question is: why was the choice of Herta Müller so surprising? A number of choices in recent years has been controversial, and it is unclear why so many expected the Nobel Committee to suddenly stop being controversial. English-language commentators were particularly shocked and some were even vicious towards Müller herself, basing their objections primarily on the fact that she is little known in the English-speaking community.

Scholarly articles had been written in German about the critical reception of Herta Müller prior to her being awarded the Nobel Prize (Eke, Sievers); however, there have been no recent German or English publications on the topic since. It is important and necessary to re-evaluate the reception of Herta Müller from a post-Nobel perspective for a variety of reasons: Firstly, the Nobel Prize has dramatically changed the perception of Herta Müller in the world, secondly, the understanding of the political environment in which her writings exist has continued to develop, as many of the themes she focuses on have become the center of attention in the post-communist Europe; finally, there seems to be significant discrepancies in regard to her reception in Germany, and in the English-speaking world.

This thesis will look at literary reviews and criticisms of Herta Müller's works in the German- and English-language media, primarily newspapers, to present a picture of how Müller's works were received. The structure of this work follows a chronological order, starting with the reception of her first novel, *Niederungen* (1982), and ending with the reception of her last novel, *Atemschaukel* (2009). It will compare the reception of the original German text with that of the English translation;¹ therefore only works which have been translated and published in English will be discussed. This will seek to show that while her work did not top the bestseller charts, at least not before the awarding of the Nobel Prize, Herta Müller was hardly the unknown author that some in the English-language media believed. It will also show that while her works were reviewed by a number of different critics writing in many different publications, there are general trends to be discovered. A final goal of this thesis is to provide a beginning for understanding the impact of the Nobel Prize on the work and reception of Herta Müller.

1. All quotes from German-language reviews were translated by the author of this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY

Herta Müller was born on August the 17th 1953 in a Danube Swabian village called Nitzkydorf in the Banat region of what is today Romania. The inhabitants of the village belonged to the German-speaking minority in Romania. Her father allegedly was one of the “ninety per cent” men of his generation, who was drafted into the Waffen SS during World War II (Haines 83). Due to “new political changes” after the war, her mother along with other Danube Swabian women of the region was deported as slave workers to the Soviet Union, where she spent five years in captivity. Müller’s most recent novel, *Atemschaukel* (2009),² deals with this topic explicitly (Rich C2). Between 1973 and 1976, Müller studied German and Romanian literature at the University of Temeswar (*Timișoara / Temesvár*). During college, she was part of a literary group called *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, whose members were German writers who fought for freedom of speech from the censorship of the communist regime (Haines 11). In the following two years she worked as a translator in a machine factory, though she lost her job because of her unwillingness to cooperate with the *Securitate*.³ After her dismissal she worked as a teacher in a kindergarten and gave private German lessons sporadically in order to earn a living.

2. The English translation will appear in fall 2011 under the name of *Everything I possess I carry with me*.

3. The secret police of the communist regime.

Herta Müller began to publish poetry in 1972 in the *Anthology of Modern Lyrics of the Banat*. (Eke 9). From 1979 on she continually published short stories in various Romanian German newspapers and also received the prize of the *Adam-Müller-Guttenbrunn-Literaturkreises* (11). However, her literary debut occurred with the appearance of her book *Niederungen (Nadirs)* in 1982, which was republished in 1984. Also in 1984, her second book *Drückender Tango* was released, followed by the *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt (The Passport)* in 1986. Although her initial emmigration application in 1985 was rejected, she finally received “permission” to leave the country in 1987 (Haines 85).

After receiving her visa, Müller moved with her husband of the time and fellow author, Richard Wagner, to West Berlin. Since then, books such as *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* (1992), *Herztier* (1994; *The Land of Green Plums*, 1996) and *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (1997; *The Appointment*, 2001), and *Atemschaukel* (2009) have appeared. Throughout this time she was giving lectures as a guest professor at universities and colleges not only in Germany, but also in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the United States.⁴ Müller also received important literary prizes and honors such as the Kleist-Preis, Franz-Kafka-Literaturpreis, Literaturpreis der Konrad Adenauer-

4. see the name of the universities listed on *Nobelprize.org*.

Stiftung among others.⁵ In 2009, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
She continues to live in Berlin.

5. See the complete list of the prizes in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 2

NIEDERUNGEN (1982; 1984; 2010) / *NADIRS* (1999)

Herta Müller published her first book, *Niederungen*, in 1982 in Bucharest. This was, however, a censored version of her work. In 1984, an “uncensored,” though abridged, version of *Niederungen* was published in West Berlin. The collection of short stories includes the story of a young girl in a Romanian-German village and describes the provincial ways of the villagers (Sievers 302; Graziella 193).⁶ These stories describe the lifestyle of the Danube Swabians sometimes in a grotesque way and from the perspective of the child. This is a world of corruption, fear, hate, intolerance, narrow-mindedness, stale Catholicism, superstition, and violence, in brief a microcosm of the happenings of the outside world. Herta Müller herself admits in an *Interview with Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler* that “The first dictatorship which I knew was the Banat Swabian village” (Haines 17). *Niederungen* can be seen and interpreted as a sharp and critical village and family chronicle, and as the chronicle of a traumatic childhood in the isolated region of the Banat after World War II (Zierden).

6. *Niederungen* underwent a number of changes before it was published both in Romania and in West Berlin. In Romania, the censors prevented many sections from being published, and also required certain stylistic changes to the text. Later, the publishers at Rotbuch also removed certain sections and changed the order that they were printed in. Rotbuch moreover added three stories that were originally printed in Müller’s second book, *Drückender Tango*, resulting in a book that was both more negative and more focused on village life. In 2010, Hanser Verlag in Munich published an “original unabridged” version of the book. The 1984 edition contains 15 stories while the 2010 edition has 19. Stories missing from the 1984 version include: “Damals im Mai,” “die Meinung,” “Inge,” and “Herr Wulschmann”. The 1982 version had 12 stories.

While Müller was already known in Romania, it was the Rotbuch release of *Niederungen* that catapulted her into the consciousness of the German literary community in Germany (Schultz-Gerstein; *Nobelprize.org*). While critics were impressed with her novels for which she received a number of literary prizes in Germany and Austria during the 1980s, many of her fellow Romanian-Germans and Romanians were much more critical. Her novels also received attention for various reasons in different countries. In Germany, Müller's works were primarily seen as self-critical works popular with left-leaning intellectuals; her works were, for example, published by the traditionally left-leaning Rotbuch Verlag (Sievers 303). Here, the criticism of communism did not play a significant role, as shown by the exclusion of these stories from the Rotbuch edition of *Niederungen* (303). In contrast, in Great Britain, Müller only became interesting as the criticism of communism came to play a greater role in her work.

German-Language Reception

As has been typical with Müller's works, the reception of *Niederungen* was mixed. After it was released in Romania, Müller received praise from intellectuals, and scorn from traditional (conservative) German-language newspapers in Romania (Sievers 300). Even before the book was published, Müller was heavily criticized. For example, one of the stories in the book, "Das schwäbische Bad"/ "The Swabian Bath," that was released in the *Neue Banater Zeitung* in 1981 was the cause of severe disagreement by ethnic German readers on Müller (Apel 11; Eke 114). One paper, *Der Donauschwabe* was especially critical of her. This paper published various criticisms after the West Berlin

release of *Niederungen* including: “Herta Müller is one of the most important workers of the propaganda division in Bucharest,” and “Had Herta Müller written similarly about her Romanian neighbors, she would have been hanged” (Apel 8). *Niederungen* is a “Horror Fairy-Tale from Nitzkydorf.” One critic in the paper accused Müller of having such a “craving for attention so that she uses every means just to stand out” (qtd. in Eke 115).

The controversy over “Das schwäbische Bad” also resulted in the following attack on Müller and her literary circle by a Nikolaus Haupt which was published in the *Neue Banater Zeitung* on 5 July 1981:

When one considers that the German people in this region need at this time, perhaps more than ever, a foothold and belief in their own value, it is understandable that the publication of this writing and the basis tone of the speeches honoring the writer would unleash the anger, disaffirmations and disgusted denials of our fellow Germans (114).

To be sure, not all of the German-language critics in Romania were negative about the work. *Neue Literatur*⁷ called *Niederungen*, “The year’s most important work of fiction” (112). Other critics, such as Rudolf Herbert praised the “openness of the texts, the authenticity of the language” and stated that her work gave hope for Romanian-German literature (112-13).

7. That time the most important German-language literary journal in Romania.

In the West, Müller was already developing a reputation as an interesting young writer. One of the first mentions of her in the western press was in a *Spiegel* article in July 1984, shortly after the Rotbuch edition of *Niederungen* was published (Schultz-Gerstein). The article was focused on the *Klagenfurter Dichter-Wettstreit* (Literary Competition). The anonymous author mentions that Müller, who at that time still lived in Temeswar (Timișoara), Romania, was unable to receive an exit visa and therefore sent her text by mail. Unfortunately, the text was disqualified right at the beginning of the competition, as the jurors determined that only authors who were present at the competition could participate. The author states: “Once this disappointment was acknowledged, the literature competition itself became the center of attention.” However, the second release of her first novel was rapidly gaining the attention of literary critics in Germany.

Shortly after the re-publication of *Niederungen* by Rotbuch Verlag, Friedrich Christian Delius⁸ wrote a positive review in *Der Spiegel* on Müller’s work (119-123). Delius begins by describing the difficult political and social situation facing ethnic Germans in communist Romania even during the 1980s. He compares the haggling between Romanian and German politicians over the size of emigration quotas with haggling over import figures for salami. Delius does emphasize, though, that understanding the actual situation of the German minority in Transylvania and in the Banat is more difficult than the generally

8. Delius is also an author, whose book *Adenauerplatz* was published shortly after this article appeared in *Der Spiegel*. He lived in West Berlin at that time.

accepted propaganda conveys. Travelling through the region is only effective at showing the external conditions and not the feelings of the inhabitants. The solution to discovering the truth, according to Delius, is to listen to authors. The problem is that those popular Romanian-German authors who had managed to receive even a little attention had long moved to the West and those who remained in Romania, such as Richard Wagner or Rolf Bossert, were completely ignored by German publishers.

In contrast, Herta Müller who still lived in Romania at the time, managed to win the attention of the highly-rated Rotbuch publisher. Delius states that in spite of being an author with an unremarkable name, modest book title, and unfashionable writing style, Müller could not be overlooked: “With her strong and accurate observational abilities and use of language, she sets her own benchmark” (119).

Delius appreciates Müller’s style, confronting the gestures, the movements, the fears and the child’s phantasies with the behaviour of the adults. He states: “Herta Müller writes as though she grew up in the Empire of Barbarity. The German village she describes is, in one word, hell-on-earth.” Müller’s stories, he says, are not used as anecdotes, to make a specific point; rather they convey everyday occurrences which repeat without causing wonder or outrage to anyone except the child. Delius points out significant elements of Müller’s book that differentiate it from other works by her Swiss and Austrian contemporaries, who portray similarly bleak life-forms in remote areas. First, Müller portrays a village in a socialist republic, yet does not write about the role of the state and politics

explicitly. She, at most, presents it with mild satire. She does not forget that the poverty and constant drudgery are a reason for the backwardness of the villagers. Müller does not draw conclusions; she provides the opportunity to the reader to think about the stories themselves and find possible explanations why collectivization did not create enlightened people, but rather further entrenched their narrow-mindedness. Delius also emphasizes, that in contrast to authors from the Alpine Republics, she is capable of making subtle jokes in her “surprising, freshly poetic phrases.”

In the first critical reaction of Müller’s work in a major German newspaper, Delius states that, “The author understands how to cross over the transitions between precise observations and continued threatening fantasies so imperceptibly that new irritations and movements always occur to the reader” (119). He concludes that the Rotbuch edition of *Niederungen* was an improved and expanded version of the original; it was a “stirring literary masterpiece which unlocks an off-white spot [weißgrauen Fleck] on the map” (119), best read by idealizers of village life.

While positive, Delius’ reaction to the book is not entirely accurate. For example, his claim that the book is “improved and expanded” (119) is problematic. The German publishers arguably made as many changes to the original work as did the Romanian censors, though perhaps not in the ways which would be expected. For example, a story with a clear criticism of communist-totalitarianism, “Die Meinung,” was included, interestingly, in the Romanian edition but not in the Rotbuch release (Sievers 302). Additionally, Delius presents

the book as an accurate portrayal of village life, specifically the life in Müller's home, Nitzkydorf. However, Müller herself stated that: "That village only exists in *Niederungen*" (Müller. "Wenn wir schweigen"). Moreover, in 1991 in her book, *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel. Wie Wahrnehmung sich erfindet*, Müller admits that all the obscenities written about her fellow countrymen were purely fiction (qtd. in Scherer 54).

English-Language Reception

Niederungen was translated and published in English in 1999 by the University of Nebraska Press as *Nadirs*, however, English-language media largely ignored the text. Any search for a reception of the work would provide limited results. The earliest mention of Müller in English-language media was merely in a footnote of an article on the German minority in Romania dating from 1991 (Dowling). This reference to Müller is based on an article in *Die Zeit* (Michaelis, "Angekommen wie nicht da") and merely states that Herta Müller and her ex-husband, Richard Wagner, were members of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat* and were persecuted for their writings by the Ceausescu⁹ regime. While the article mentions that Wagner is the author of *Ausreiseantrag*¹⁰ (1988), "a chilling portrayal of life in the ethnic German community in the latter years of the Ceausescu regime," no reference is made to Müller's works. Later, in a report of a conference on women in Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe in 1994, Müller, "the exiled

9. President of Romania from 1974 to 1989

10. This work has not yet been translated into English. The title *Ausreiseantrag* translates to "Emigration Petition".

Romanian/German writer,” is acknowledged as the person “who raised the active role of women in dictatorships” (Grünell 118). Again, the authors do not actually discuss any of Müller’s works.

Both her later novels *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986) / *The Passport* (1989) and *Herztier* (1994) / *The Land of Green Plums* (1996) were translated into English before *Niederungen* / *Nadirs* (1999), and therefore have earlier reviews. However, in contrast to the attention *Herztier* received internationally, *Nadirs* (*Niederungen*) was largely ignored by the English-speaking critics.¹¹ The editors of *Women in German Yearbook* commented briefly on *Nadirs* in the introduction to an autobiographical essay written by Müller and translated by Sieglinde Lug, who also translated *Niederungen* into *Nadirs* (Müller, Lug). However, this introduction stated little more about *Nadirs* other than that it was “forthcoming with the University of Nebraska Press.”

The first review of *Nadirs* before the Nobel Prize was published by Irene Furhoff in *The International Fiction Review* in 2003. This review begins by introducing Müller as someone who has won many literary prizes, and then discusses the background of the book. Specifically, Furhoff states, rather misleadingly as another version was published two years earlier in Bucharest and some stories were also previously published in newspapers, that the stories in *Nadirs* were originally published by RotbuchVerlag. Furhoff also mentions

11. Possible because, unlike *The Land of Green Plums*, *Nadirs* did not win any major English-language literary prizes.

Müller's other works which had been, at that time, translated into English, specifically *The Passport* and *The Land of Green Plums*.

In her review, Furhoff presents the work as, “depict[ing] the bleak reality of rural life under Ceausescu's regime of horror.” As is apparent in many English-language reviews, this focuses on the work as political commentary directed against Ceausescu's regime, as compared to German-language reviews which saw the work as being primarily critical of the German minority. Furhoff claims that the criticism of the German village is actually part of the political discussion; “The brutality of the regime is reflected in the peasants' cruelty...grotesque descriptions of peasant life in a small village act as a metaphor for the oppression of dictatorship” (35). Overall, Furhoff praises Müller's work, which she also read in German. She also praises translator Sieglinde Lung for being “able to give the reader a taste of Müller's unique language.” In conclusion, she hopes that more of Müller's works will be translated.

Conclusion

The reception of Herta Müller's early works, such as *Niederungen*, varied greatly depending on the nationality of the publisher and reviewer. In Romania, many Romanian-Germans, such as those from the above mentioned newspapers, viewed her works as an unfair criticism of them, though Müller received positive reviews as well.

Outside of Romania, left-leaning Germans saw the works as a self-critical view of life in Romanian-German villages. These commentators were very impressed by Müller's works and, during the 1980s; she was the recipient of

a number of literary prizes in Germany. These prizes show the respect Müller won through her early work, including *Niederungen* and other books discussed below. Even today, decades after the awards were given; some of the presenting organizations emphasize their support in her early career. For example, on the home page of the Rauriser Literaturpreis, the organizers have prominently displayed a picture of Müller with the caption: “From Rauriser Literaturpreis in 1985 to Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009” (Rauriser Literaturtage). According to Rene Kegelmann, *Niederungen* and Müller’s subsequent works led to the acceptance of Romanian-German literature, which had previously been considered “backwards” in the West (205). Generally, the 1980s marked the development of Herta Müller from an unknown Romanian-German author into the most prominent author of the genre in the German-speaking community.

The English-speaking commentators have generally viewed Herta Müller’s works as primarily political commentary. These critics often proclaim that Müller has an important and moving story to tell, yet see Müller’s language as “apologetic” and criticize her style (Pryce-Jones). In contrast, Furhoff was impressed that the translation of *Nadirs* (*Niederungen*) is able to convey Müller’s “prose poems” in such a “highly convincing manner” (35).

CHAPTER 3

DER MENSCH IST EIN GROßER FASAN AUF DER WELT (1986) / *THE*

PASSPORT (1989)

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt / The Passport was Müller's third novel, and the first to be published originally in Berlin. While her writing style remained very similar to that in *Niederungen*, it was much more political and this is reflected in both the marketing and reviews thereof (Eke 119). The book concerns itself with the efforts of a Romanian-German family to emigrate to the West and was the first of Müller's books to be translated into English. It was sold, as was *Niederungen*, by Rotbuch as a story about Romanian-Germans, whereas the English publisher, Serpent's Tail, presented the book as a criticism of the Romanian regime (Sievers 304).

German-Language Reception

As with her previous works, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt / The Passport* also received criticism from the Romanian-German community. In a critique published in the *Banater Post*, Horst Fessel wrote that Müller is carelessly serving the Romanian state ideology and that her work is the result of "her personal obsessions" (qtd. in Eke 116). In contrast, commentators in Germany were again overwhelmingly positive of her writing style and linguistic ability; additionally, the political side of the text received greater attention (Eke 118-19). Ursula Homann suggested that the work "masterfully combines an impacting social critique with quality poetry" (119). Sibylle Cramer greeted

Müller's stories as a rebirth of the "Dorfgeschichte" (village story) upon having succumbed to fascist ideology (119).

English-Language Reception

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt was the first of Müller's works to be translated into English; as previously mentioned *Niederungen* was not translated into English until 1999. Herta Müller explained in an interview that a "Fasan" (pheasant) symbolizes a confident person in German, while in Romanian it represents a "loser" (Sievers 306). The name of the English translation, *The Passport*, shows the publisher's emphasis on the main topic of the text, which is the family's efforts to get an exit visa (306).

For example, David Pryce-Jones emphasizes the role of totalitarianism in the story in his review of the English translation for *The Independent* (28). Pryce-Jones begins his review by stating: "How to escape from a totalitarian country is an agony peculiar to modern times, and it lies at the heart of Herta Müller's novella." In describing the story, he focuses on the oppressiveness of the regime and its role in the horrible conditions experienced by the ethnic Germans, the "Swabians."

While he is generally sympathetic to the story itself, Pryce-Jones is critical of the style. For example, he points out that chapters and sentences are often very short and chapters have fanciful titles. He concludes, "Such literary pretentiousness has an air of apologizing for a story that could not be trusted to speak for itself. Yet it is the simple appeal to pity these sad victims which alone rings true." (28) This criticism of Müller's style is repeated by Carole Angier in

her review of *The Land of Green Plums* in 1998 (Angier 5; Sievers 307).¹²

However, it contrasts with another, post-Nobel, review of *The Passport* published in *The Independent* (McDowell). In this later review, Lesley McDowell says of *The Passport*, “Often harrowing, startling, as devoid of decoration as the world she is describing, Müller’s work demands to be read.” Of course, even McDowell emphasizes that the novel is about the difficulties of living under totalitarianism. These reviews for the most part focus on the political importance of Müller’s work as a comment on communism and this devalues Müller’s role as an artist.

With the exception of the critique by Pryce-Jones in *The Independent*, *The Passport* received very little attention in the English-language media at the time of its initial publication in 1989. One other major paper to comment on the book was *The Guardian*, which published a short comment: “A German village in Romania is caught between a stifling dictatorship and the glitz and temptations of the West. The author was born in Timiș, Romania but forced to leave there in 1987 because of her support for the German minority” (“Tuesday Women: Bulletin.”). Shortly thereafter, *The Guardian* also published an excerpt of the novel (“Extract: A Long Night in Romania.”).

12. Wiebke Sievers also emphasizes the similarity of the criticism in these two reviews.

CHAPTER 4

REISENDE AUF EINEM BEIN (1989) / *TRAVELING ON ONE LEG* (1998)

Reisende auf einem Bein, Müller's fifth book, was published in 1989 in Berlin. German critics hailed it as a return by the author to narration and away from the abstractness of *Barfußiger Februar* (Eke 123). The female protagonist, Irene, tries to find her place in her new environment and unsuccessfully attempts to integrate. She encounters alienation through failed love stories and acute loneliness (Grazziella 193). The search for human relationships through love, fashion, and newspaper collages seem to be a futile attempt to overcome the alienation. She remains as much a stranger in West Germany as in Romania.

German-Language Reception

In the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Katja Rauch stated that:

The characteristic tone has remained the same as always, short, stand-offish, and strong expressively. Yet in total, the author (Cramer) has gone as far into a new stylistic country as she has in her life. Compared to the abstractness of *Barfußiger Februar*, she has also left behind the surrealistic and magical imagery of her first books (qtd. in Eke 123).

Sybille Cramer, however, criticized the "overexertion of an exemplary narrative, which always keeps in mind the correspondence of detail and total" (123-124). In *Die Tageszeitung*, Peter Laudenbach praised the work for being able to convey the "foreign view" and to show the "familiar as comfortless" (124).

English-Language Reception

Reisende auf einem Bein was published in English in 1998 by Hydra Books/Northwestern University Press as *Travelling on One Leg*. The book was reviewed by William Ferguson in the *New York Times*. Ferguson finds that *Travelling on One Leg* is “a superb short novel first published in German in 1989 and ably translated here by Valentina Glăjar and Andre Lefevere.” Compared with other English-language commentators who seem to think that her poetic style detracts from the story, Ferguson seems to be appreciative. “The narration is spare to the point of madness, poetry of anguish built upon images of division or inversion.” He concludes that while “The action in this volume may be slight; [...] Irene's innermost consciousness -- where the political has indeed become the personal -- is magnificently portrayed.”

CHAPTER 5

HERZTIER (1994) / *THE LAND OF GREEN PLUMS* (1996)

Herta Müller published *Herztier* in 1994, through the Rowohlt Verlag. It was also released shortly thereafter in English by Metropolitan Books in the United States as *The Land of Green Plums*. *Herztier* is Müller's most successful work. It won her the prestigious Kleist Prize and the English translation won the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. There is a very noticeable difference between the reviews of German and English commentators, as well as significant differences among English reviewers.

As with many of her other works, *Herztier* takes place in Romania and deals with repression under the dictatorship and the consequences thereof. The story centers on four friends of the German minority and the challenges they face. They escape the strict traditions of the village, to be oppressed by the regime. Those who manage to leave for Germany, struggle to integrate into society there.

German-Language Reception

Rolf Michaelis defines *Herztier* as being “A strange, wonderful book” (“In der Angst zu Haus”). In 1994 he wrote an inspiring review of *Herztier* in *Die Zeit*. Michaelis asserts: “Often whispering magically, blessedly picturesque – and therefore simply horrifying.” Like others, Michaelis points out that while it is titled a “novel,” *Herztier* is better described as “poetic prose.” While Michaelis praises the artistic form of her work, he also focuses on the subject:

The storyteller does not just simply lead us to the Balkans where a Transylvanian tyrant represses the people with refined methods of

torture and brainwashing, rather she shows us the view of her own mind and heart where everyone's own power either rules or can be drawn to the tyrant out of fear.

He wonders if there is even one page in the entire book without the word "fear" and identifies some of the most moving and identifiable stories in the work. For example, after a night of drinking, workers "grind" through everything they had said the night before, wondering and fearing if anything would be interpreted as political since they knew that the bartenders would report everything. Müller writes: "They were at home in their fear." Michaelis is impressed that fear "creeps" in, even when the "word is almost or entirely avoided." Michaelis concludes that "fear" is not only the theme of the book, but the reason for its importance.

Fear – that one word, the one syllable: how many-voiced, threatening to the ear, life-destructing these four letters can be. This is the misery at the foundation of Herta Müller's story of survival. [...] This is what makes Herta Müller's poetic epic, which can only be read as "just" a political novel, an important book.

Reading Michaelis' review, it is easy to understand why Müller won the biannual Kleist Prize in Germany. He compares her work to that of Homer, and states: "Müller doesn't just help herself to the German language; in her incomparable manner she makes it her own."

In the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Beatrice von Matt also wrote a very positive review of Müller's *Herztier*. Von Matt begins her review by pointing out that while Müller emigrated from Romania seven years previously, "she returns with every book" and that *Herztier* is considerably more autobiographical than her previous work, *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*. In *Herztier*, the reader can identify Müller's friends, Richard Wagner and Rolf Bossert, without difficulty. As with Michaelis, though not to the same extent, von Matt also discusses the element of fear in the novel. The characters are "friends of fear."

After briefly discussing the book, von Matt states:

Let's get straight to the point, *Herztier* is a splendid, a masterful book. What Müller has until now approached with short prose, the childhood and the years before exile, she has developed with oneiric and ghastly consequence into a compact novel.

She goes into great detail about the content of the novel and observes:

This is Herta Müller's realization: this country has sunk into a dark age. It is unchangeable. The small villages have all remained dirty. The darkness imposed by the dictator is little more than another system of bondage. Nobody here can develop the ability to think abstractly or simply to carry on in their mind through fantasy.

Everyone remains stuck on the ground, even the poets.

In the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Esther Röhr provides yet another example of a critic entranced by the role that fear plays in *Herztier*. "One who wants to talk about dealing with fear as Herta Müller does must learn to be silent like her."

According to Röhr, *Herztier* is also a novel about death. The characters are spurred to action by the “suicide” of their friend Lola. They read forbidden literature in secret and send lists, with the names of those killed trying to escape, out of Romania. *Herztier* shows how the characters deal with fear and death. Georg, Edgar, Kurt and the “I” narrator are a translator, engineer and teacher: “Then they have been fired. Then two of them are dead and the two are living in Germany trying to find the correct way to speak and the correct way to be silent.” Röhr concludes that, “*Herztier* questions, and questions intelligently. [This story] lies nowhere better than in Herta Müller’s hands.”

In the German weekly, *Der Freitag*, Thomas Kraft also reviewed *Herztier*, in October 1994. He begins his review by reminding readers of the poet Rolf Bossert’s suicide shortly after emigrating to the Federal Republic of Germany from Romania. Bossert was a close friend of Müller’s and, regarding his death, she commented, “He was pushed so far by the Romanian officials that he couldn’t believe that he had really left the country, he actually carried this country with him, like a stone that pulled him under.” As with von Matt, Kraft points out that Müller based the characters in *Herztier* on herself and her friends, including Bossert.

Kraft states, “The example of Bossert is not the only one that Romania is not only a geographic place, which one can leave, but rather it is also a psychological situation which continues to affect beyond borders.” It is this psychological state that Müller writes about in *Herztier*, and Kraft opines: “One does not impose on the author when it is understood that this novel, due to the

number of clearly biographical segments, is a personal ‘coming to terms with memory’.” Kraft singles out the role of Tereza, for which there is also a historical inspiration, as being particularly tragic and convincing: “Before she is revealed as an informer, she hid the narrator’s manuscripts among other things. Shortly after betraying her friends, she died from cancer – an unlucky and almost tragic destiny that is mastery shown both in naivety and cold-bloodedness.” Kraft concludes: “Little, then, has changed in the newest novel from Herta Müller. At the most -- as a result of the acclimation in the new linguistic home – the accent of her story has become softer, in the content she, fortunately, has remained hard.”

These German-language reviews are all positive, and while they focus on slightly different elements of the story, they acknowledge that the novel is one of fear. None of these reviewers questions Müller’s ability. Röhr also emphasizes that Müller won the prestigious Kleist-Prize for German Literature for the novel. While the English-translation of *Herztier*, *The Land of Green Plums*, also earned Müller awards, English-language commentators were much more critical of the work than their counterparts in Germany.

English-Language Reception

After the translation and publication of *The Land of Green Plums*, a number of English-language commentators, such as in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* in 1996 reviewed the work favorably. Here the reviewer, Glenda Winders, focuses on the story as evidence of the atmosphere under communism in Romania. She discusses the fear that Müller is able to convey, through short

narratives about how students pull out their hair to leave on the top of their suitcases to know if their belongings have been searched while they are away:

This heart-breaking tale is bitter and dark, yet beautiful, possibly because the experiences of the characters are based on the author's own memories of losing her job and having her life threatened until she obtained permission to leave Romania in 1987.

Winders is, somewhat typically for English-language commentators, not quite satisfied with the poetic manner in which Müller presents the story: "This book is not 'pleasant' to read or 'satisfying' in any traditional sense," Despite this, she concludes that the book "provides a glimpse into a very real nightmare that, without works like this, few people outside Romania would ever understand." Interestingly, Winders never mentions that Müller is a Romanian-German or that she wrote the book in German.

A review in *The New York Times* by Larry Wolff found that the "novel is of graphically observed detail in which the author seeks to create a sort of poetry out of the spiritual and material ugliness of life in Communist Romania". Wolff seems, however, to be somewhat perplexed by Müller's identity, stating "The book was not, however, written in Romanian." He follows this comment by clarifying that Müller was a member of the Romanian-German ethnic minority before leaving for Germany in 1987. In fact, while describing the novel, Wolff does not focus primarily on the commercial difficulties faced by the protagonists. The two scenes from the novel that he discusses are when the students use their saliva to make their mascara usable and their desire for higher-quality nylon

stockings, and how the narrator becomes the subject of communist party suspicion.

After discussing the novel itself, Wolff comments on the historical background. He explains, for example, that the Habsburgs in the early eighteenth century encouraged German settlers to move to areas which today belong to the modern state of Romania. Wolff is somewhat imprecise, unfortunately. He uses the term “German” indiscriminately, since Müller comes from an area called the “Banat,” where the ethnic Germans are Danube Swabians. Transylvania, which is also part of modern Romania, is inhabited by another group of ethnic Germans, the Transylvania Saxons, whose ancestors settled in the area in the 12th century at the invitation of the Hungarian king, Géza II. Wolff does correctly point out that Müller’s native tongue, German, was “the painfully direct expression of profound alienation” in Romania.

Wolff ends his article discussing the emigration by ethnic Germans from Romania and the feelings that Müller conveys in her book. His final comment is that “Müller conveys a certain sadness over the historical implications of emigration, the impending doom of her own native culture and society.” If anything, this comment reflects the importance of Müller’s work in increasing the awareness of Romania as a historically multi-cultural nation and the plight of the minorities there under Ceausescu’s oppressive nationalistic policies.

In 1998, Müller and her translator Michael Hoffman were awarded the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for *The Land of Green Plums* (IMPAC Dublin Award). In contrast to the earlier American reviews, the judges

state right at the beginning of the award citation that “Ms Müller is a Romanian-born writer – a member of that country’s German-speaking minority – now living in Berlin.” In contrast to most English-speaking commentary, the judges also were very impressed with her style: “The author’s style achieves a Spartan eloquence and the novel’s individual characters are powerfully drawn. This elegantly understated book is at once bleak and beautiful, humorous and heart-breaking.”

In an article in *The Independent* on Sunday prior to the announcement of the IMPAC Award, Vanessa Thorpe discussed the contenders on the shortlist for the award and mentioned the following: “The least familiar of the judge’s choices is probably a book called *The Land of Green Plums* by Romanian writer Herta Müller.” Thorpe continues that this was the only translated work on the list, and points out that the novel “has already won Germany’s most prestigious literary award, the Kleist prize.”

While the IMPAC Dublin Award is the most prestigious literary prize for fiction,” many papers either ignored the decision or published a very short statement. *The Guardian*, for example, ran a mere ninety-one-words article stating: “The book by Müller, 45, shared a 10-title shortlist [...] but was the only one not written in English” (“News in Brief” 6). *The New York Times* ran another very short piece, stating simply that “Müller won against nine other finalists” (Van Gelder). *The Guardian* did, however, rectify its mistake by running two articles on Müller, an interview with her, as well as a longer review of *The Land of Green Plums*, shortly after the award was announced. *The Independent* ran a

very critical article in opposition to the award, while *The Times* followed *The Guardian* in publishing a short piece after the award was announced and a longer review a few months later.

Soon after announcing that Müller had won the IMPAC Award, *The Guardian* published an article on Müller which was part interview and part review (Staunton 9). In this piece, Denis Staunton, the interviewer/critic, begins by discussing Müller's feelings about the death of Nicolae Ceausescu. "For 15 years I wished him dead. I thought that when he was executed I'd be so relieved. But I had the opposite reaction. I couldn't stop weeping." Staunton says that "such mixed feelings are at the heart of [...] *The Land of Green Plums*." The discussion continues to the book itself, including a brief overview of the story, as well as the influence of Müller's actual life on the story. Specifically, Staunton writes about her personal experiences with the Romanian *Securitate* and growing up in the German-speaking minority in Banat. While most of the characters in the novel are "composites," Müller states that the character "Teresa" was based on a real person who was a close friend of hers, until she (Teresa) betrayed her (Müller) to the Romanian secret police. Müller exclaims that "During all the time, I believed she was loyal. Of course I never knew." Müller eventually discovered that her friend had made copies of the keys to Müller's apartment to give to the *Securitate*. This friendship, betrayal, and the subsequent death of her friend caused Müller "conflicting emotions." Staunton also discusses Müller's departure from Romania. However, he does not actually take any position on her writing, rather

focusing on Müller herself and the background of the novel. A more traditional review was published by *The Guardian* almost a month later, on the 25 July 1998.

In this later review, Ian Thomson writes: “*The Land of Green Plums* is a harsh, raw novel with an undertow of melancholy, and [Müller] weaves her tale of oppression with a deft economy of words [...]. This book will linger on in the mind, and Michael Hofmann’s translation is a marvel” (Thomson 10). Most of the article deals with the plot of the novel and as with most English-language reviewers which appreciate the book, Thomson focuses on the cruelty of the regime: famished slaughterhouse workers drinking cow’s blood, blood pumped from newborns’ heads in maternity clinics, and suicide after pressure from the *Securitate*.

Like *The Guardian*, *The Times* published a short announcement of the award and followed this later with a longer article. The initial article states little about *The Land of Green Plums* other than mentioning the publishers in the US and UK and that the book “is set in Romania at the height of Ceausescu’s regime and [...] reflects Müller’s own experience” (Wagner 12). As for Müller, the article states: “A Romanian novelist unpublished in Britain has won the third International IMPAC award for fiction.” Considering the normally high quality of reporting by *The Times*, this short article makes a surprising number of inaccurate, or at least unclear, statements. Firstly, the author, Erica Wagner, describes Müller as “A Romanian novelist,” when Romanian-German would clearly be more accurate. Wagner continues that Müller is “unpublished in Britain,” however; Serpent’s Tail would surely disagree since they published *The Passport* in 1989.

Of course, despite this, Müller was fairly unknown in the English-language literary community prior to the IMPAC Award.

The Times also ran a longer piece on *The Land of Green Plums* a few months after the IMPAC Award (Gilber). While this review also covered *The History of Silence* by Barbara Neil, the bulk of it deals with *The Land of Green Plums*. Gilber states:

Other literary influences reverberate through this novel; the anonymous heroine trapped within the machinations of the nameless, malevolent state suggest, Kafka, the way in which totalitarianism corrupts friendships recalls Orwell, and the vivid and surreal imagery suggest Latin American magic-realism.¹³

Wagner concludes that Müller's "poetic prose [...] never seeks to escape from the appalling realities" (12).

While the judges of the IMPAC Award were clearly very impressed by Müller's novel and the above mentioned critics reviewed the work favorably as well, other English-language commentators felt that the award was not appropriate. In a review of *The Land of Green Plums* in *The Independent*, Carole Angier severely criticizes the work and attacks the judges' decision (Angier 5). Angier claims that "samizdat published anything that contained a breath of dissent" regardless of quality. She claims that quality only decreased after the fall of communism as "There was an intoxication with writing for its own sake; a

13. This reference to Kafka is repeated a decade later in a post-Nobel Prize article on Müller by Julian Evans (3).

narcissism not of subject [...] but of style.” Angier states that “this is more a poem than a novel, and not always (to my taste [...]) a good poem.” As with the earlier review of *The Passport* in *The Independent*, Angier feels that the style detracts from an otherwise interesting and important story: “The most annoying thing of all is that every now and again you glimpse a riveting story, and someone who could tell it.”

Angier saves some of her most biting criticism for the judges. She points out that, with the exception of a Finn, all of the judges are American or live in America. “I don’t want to say that Americans cannot judge European writing. Perhaps, quite properly, they feel humble before a kind of human suffering they have been spared; and this may have influenced the judges’ decision.” While she does try to temper this by acknowledging that her criticisms are largely due to taste, her comments about the nationality of the judges lends itself to the conclusion that her criticisms are not unbiased. Angier concludes: “Herta Müller can write, and hers is a terrible story. If she had only told it, instead of making fine phrases – now that would have been worth a prize.” Generally, it seems that this critique is meant to be primarily provocative, rather than a reasoned argument about the merits of the book.

CHAPTER 6

HEUTE WÄR ICH MIR LIEBER NICHT BEGEGNET (1997) / *THE APPOINTMENT* (2001)

Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet / *The Appointment* also deals with oppression under the dictatorship in Romania; however, here the main character is a simple woman who remembers her life while traveling on the tram to an interrogation by the government police. Unlike Müller's other protagonists, the narrator here is uneducated and the horrors of her life make resistance futile.

German-Language Reception

In contrast to many of her other books which received a significant amount of critical acclaim, *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*, was received with what can be best described as exhaustion. Critics, while generally recognizing Müller's talent, seemed to be concerned that the novel continued with the same topic of most of her prior works, namely life in Communist Romania. These critics accused Müller of "artistic stagnation" (Scheer).¹⁴

Writing in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Ernst Osterkamp wrote a review. He is particularly interested in Müller's choice of protagonist in this novel. While the main character again takes the form of an "I-narrator," she is not, unlike in previous novels, an "intellectual." In Müller's previous works, the narrator was a teacher or translator. In *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*,

14. This claim is not universal, though it is a recurring theme in the reviews discussed here. A short review by Udo Scheer merely discusses the book and concludes at the end: "Müller has achieved a work which carries the truth with her simple, absorbing language."

the narrator is a simple factory worker, and, also unlike protagonists in her previous works, she is not a member of any opposition group. The result, according to Osterkamp, is that “She is therefore even more helpless at estimating the mechanisms of the secret police and the nightmare into which she falls is darker. In the end, nothing more than questioning is needed to break her.”

Osterkamp, however, does not grant praise without also providing serious criticism and presents two important concerns about the book. First, he states that Müller’s use of language is “thinned-out”. Though he acknowledges that this is clearly an attempt by Müller to tell the story from the perspective of a less-educated factory worker, Osterkamp thinks that the approach is problematic: “The entire novel fluctuates between a social commentary and literary criticism of totalitarianism.” The critic also points out that the content is very negative, with the narrator facing terror from every side: “The reader will very quickly realize that Herta Müller’s novel always decides on the worst possible variation. Therefore, it is soon no longer surprising.”

Osterkamp’s second serious concern is that “Herta Müller’s newest novel shows signs of artistic stagnation.” This is due to the continued dependence of Romania as a background for the story and because “many motives will be familiar to readers of her earlier works.” It is this criticism which is the most serious, since it is a criticism to be echoed in reviews of the novel by other critics.

In another review, Sabine Kebir wrote in *Die Tageszeitung* that, “Herta Müller has already told us much about the desperate dullness in the Romanian dictator. Her newest novel also plays out in the milieu of the Germans there.” (9)

The critic begins by praising the novel: “Herta Müller again lets her punchy, gestural language, in which the perspective is constantly changing, be heard.”

Kebir points out that Müller continues with her very visual language: “In their snouts, Lilli laid there as red as a whole bed of red poppies.”

Kebir is entranced by Müller’s “extraordinary talent;” however, she is concerned that Müller focuses these talents entirely on Romania. Kebir asks: “Is there nothing oppressive or frightful to describe in her new home Germany next to the numerous literature prizes she has won, which can be observed between the local trash bins and sparkling glass façades?” She concludes that it would be too disappointing if Müller, like other human rights activists, would focus solely on the “gaping wounds” of past dictatorships while ignoring the “abscesses caused by the creeping illness of the so-called democracy.” This criticism is somewhat the mirror image of English-language commentary on Müller’s works. Kebir praises Müller’s style and talent while desiring her to deal with contemporary issues in Germany. English-language critics often criticize her style and wish that she would express the important story of oppression under communism. This review is an excellent example of the roles personal ideology and artistic taste play. However, Kebir’s concern that Müller’s work is too dependent on Ceausescu’s Romania is strikingly similar to that expressed by Osterkamp.

This concern of stagnation was also repeated by Uwe Schütte in *Der Spiegel*. Schütte’s review followed the previous two reviews, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Tageszeitung* respectively, more than a month later and uses almost the exact language to describe the problem. “The storytelling is

artistic, laconic and carnal; however it exhibits signs of artistic stagnation.” As far as criticism, Schütte does not contribute much more to the discussion on stagnation than did the other critics. He points out that *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* focuses on Romania under Ceausescu, as did her other recent novels, though he also reminds readers that her first novel after emigrating to Germany was about the challenges facing immigrants from the east in Germany. However, despite the seemingly negative impression the introduction gives, Schütte’s review is overall very positive. He states:

In artistically directed fragments of memory and episodes, Müller shows how the actions, thoughts and sensations of the young narrator become completely controlled by the impending questioning. Her life is completely conquered by fear.

Schütte also compares, as do others, Müller’s work to that of Kafka. “The novel presents a Kafkaesque atmosphere from diffuse threats and omnipresent insecurity, but never loses sight of the reality of Stalinist Romania.”

While all of these reviewers are impressed with Müller’s style and talent, they also point out that the work is very similar to her previous novels. This, however, is not an issue which arises in English-language commentary, primarily due to the obvious fact that few of Müller’s works have been translated into English. Those works which had been translated were also published initially in limited numbers. English-language critics were therefore able to look at the translated work with fresh eyes.

English-Language Reception

Following the success of *The Land of Green Plums*, the novel *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* was translated into English as well and published in 2001 as *The Appointment*. However, like the German version, *The Appointment* received much less attention than *Herztier* had.

The New York Times published two reviews on *The Appointment* within months of each other. Richard Eder had a review published on September 12, 2001, and Peter Filkins wrote another which appeared on October 21, 2001. Eder's article begins with a discussion of communism in Romania and the plot of the novel, a tram ride to an interrogation (Eder). He points out the narrator's various sexual difficulties with men, her husband, father, father-in-law, and boss. Eder concludes that the focus of the book is betrayal and that "Nothing in the narrator's life is safe from contamination: not her closest friends, not even her lover." Overall, his review is very positive. Eder states: "Müller is a poet and a good one." He also compares her to George Orwell. Style does not play much of a role in his review, as he focuses mostly on the plot and emotions of the story. However, it is clear that Eder is impressed by Müller's work.

Peter Filkins in contrast takes a clearly negative view of *The Appointment*. After briefly describing the plot, Filkins begins to criticize the work; he finds that the book is "not very rewarding." "I find it impossible to establish a clear narrative arc, even though the narrator's tram ride, and a mortifying discovery by her at the end of it, would seem to provide just such a natural underpinning." Filkins also finds that the work "is more a test of endurance than a pleasure."

As with other English-language reviewers, Filkins is bothered by the style: “Such sentences may be effective in German, but they can seem an arbitrary annoyance in English.” Without stating it directly, Filkins’ criticisms recalled those of David Pryce-Jones (28), in that both feel that Müller’s literary style detracts from an important story. Filkins’ states: “[Müller] is more interested in examining the fallout among personal relationships under totalitarianism than she is in the wrongs of the regime itself.” Later he continues: “It is as if the narrator, and by extension Müller, distrusted even the reader, afraid that if she were to tell her story in a more conventional fashion she would not only betray the harrowing nature of her experience, but also herself.”

Filkins is, unfortunately, not as accurate in his commentary as would be expected from a reviewer for *The New York Times*. He states that Müller “grew up in a German-speaking family in Romania but did not write about her homeland until after she migrated to Germany in 1987.” The reasoning behind this belief is unclear. It is possible that Filkins was unaware of Müller’s German-language work, though *Nadirs* was published in 1999, two years before this review. The misstatements in this review are another sign of the inconsistent quality of reporting on Müller in the English-language press.

One other review of the novel was printed by *The Columbus Dispatch*. Here the author, Margaret Quamme, presents a summary of the novel:

On one level, Herta Müller’s *The Appointment* is the story of one day in the life of a young woman on the edge of losing her mind.

On another, it is an account of many years of oppression in an unnamed Communist country in Eastern Europe (07F).

Quamme seems to be fairly ambiguous in her review, though generally is positive of Müller's work. She states: "The story of the narrator's life can be pieced together only gradually and incompletely." Though Quamme states that this is appropriate since the narrator "has little hope for a future." Müller's language is described as "simple and disturbing," yet Quamme continues that the scenes and metaphors are "vivid." Overall, this review spends little time discussing the style and unfortunately, as with many of the English-language critiques, makes some erroneous claims: for example, *The Appointment* is described as Müller's "second novel." Considering the number of books Müller authored, this is clearly a misstatement. Even if only the English translations are considered, *The Appointment* (2001) would be the fourth behind *The Passport* (1989), *Nadirs* (1999) and *The Land of Green Plums* (1999).

CHAPTER 7

ATEMSCHAUKELE (2009) / *EVERYTHING I POSSESS I CARRY WITH ME*

(2011)

Atemschaukel, Müller's most recent novel, was published in 2009 before the Nobel Prize was announced. Reviews for the book were written both before and after. The English translation will be published in the fall of 2011. Unlike the majority of her other works, *Atemschaukel* does not deal with the Romanian dictator, but rather it focuses on the suffering of ethnic Germans deported to the Soviet Union after World War II as forced labor. It was originally intended to be jointly written with Müller's friend and fellow Romanian German author, Oskar Pastior. Pastior himself experienced the deportations and forced labor; however, he died in 2006. Müller then decided to write the story herself, based on her conversations with him and interviews with other survivors.

Writing in *Der Tagesspiegel*, Jochen Jung reviewed *Atemschaukel* two months before it was announced that Herta Müller would win the Nobel Prize. He begins, "One knows without any doubt right from the first sentence that everything told here with a consistent penetrating voice is all true, it all happened, regardless of whether the word "novel" is put on the book or not." Jung begins by discussing the history behind Müller's book. Romanian-Germans were deported to labor camps in the Ukraine at the orders of the Soviet Union beginning in 1945. Jung points out that the political background doesn't play any significant role in Müller's work; she writes only of the Russian rulers of the camp and the slaves who are represented by the 17-year-old narrator of the story, Leo Auberg. He goes

on to say: “The arrests, the cattle-cars, the camp. One will recognize these from other shocking, violent ‘Camp-Books’.” Jung compares the book to the works of Imre Kertész, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2002, and Primo Levi: “Herta Müller has written this as a story about an individual and simultaneously as the story of all those oppressed. To do so, she has an extraordinary language at her disposal, a tone of greatly coerced sobriety, as if between every two sentences a scream had to be suppressed.” Jung also takes time to identify a number of portmanteaus Müller creates in the work: as with the word *Herztier* (heart-animal), from her earlier novel, here she writes of *Atemschaukel* (breath-swing) and *Hungerengel* (hunger-angel).

Karl-Markus Gauss, writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, also reviewed *Atemschaukel* positively and pointed out Müller’s portmanteaus. Gauss begins his review by discussing the plight of the laborers, how they did not know how long their sentence was for, and that only after five years, if they didn’t starve or kill themselves, or be executed, were they permitted to return home. Even when they did return, they often were unable to overcome their shame or find the words to describe the humiliation and agony, as there was often no one who was willing to listen. Gauss then points out the irony that Müller wrote a book on that suffering:

Herta Müller, who was often very hard in judgment with her Romanian-German countrymen and did not conceal that many Saxons and Swabs were questionably involved with National Socialism, has now taken it upon herself to give a voice to those whose destiny was so long and so fundamentally silenced.

Gauss does not, as with other reviews, just point out that the book is important as a political statement. He makes it very clear that *Atemschaukel* is a masterly, artistic work:

It is a harrowing novel, the best book that Herta Müller, already praised for so many works of prose and essays, has written; a destructive masterpiece, audacious and linguistically creative, an attempt, to speak out of the center of hell, in a totally individual, pictures language, which must find words where the conventional fails to comprehend the terror.

Writing in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Andrea Köhler writes that *Atemschaukel* is what Kafka meant when he said that: “a book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside of us” (Köhler, “Das Buch vom Hunger”)... “The concentration camp books of Primo Levi, Jorge Semprun und Imre Kertész, the Gulag experiences of Alexander Solschenizyn und Warlam Schalamow, have presented us the camp existence from their own authentic perspective.” Müller did not herself experience the camps; but rather, she worked on the novel with Oskar Pastior, who spent years in Soviet captivity, and therefore, *Atemschaukel* is in many ways his story. Köhler asks if Müller can tell a story in someone else’s voice by saying: “One who has never starved, cannot understand the pangs of hunger.” The critic answers her own question, and she states that it is impossible to judge the authenticity: “The language is surprising in every sentence. Herta Müller has found words for the horror of starvation, which strips the meat from the bones.”

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Michael Lentz also reviewed the work favorably and identified areas of Müller's success. Müller only discusses the historical background necessary for the story. The plight of the "in total almost 80,000 Romanian-Germans has been a taboo for decades in Romania." Lentz points out that Müller doesn't discuss the widely held belief that the deportations were Stalin's personal plan rather than that of the Romanian regime. Lentz also identifies Müller's incorporation of Transylvanian myths into the story. The Ukrainian capo of the camp is named Prikulitsch, which in regional legends is a person who changes his shape, like a werewolf:

This book does not want nor can it be a documentation or historical novel and has nothing to do with any duty to a naïve memory image. With its thick net of motives, the novel achieves an intensity and presence, the likes of which is nowhere else to find in contemporary German literature.

Lentz concludes, like many others, that *Atemschaukel* is, "A Masterpiece."

Alexandra Millner, in *Die Presse*, is yet another critic who agreed, "In contrast with her previous work, the language here does not serve as an instrument of power, it is a survival strategy. In this a lingual masterpiece is developed." However, there were negative reviews of the work as well. Unlike many other reviewers, Iris Radisch did not find that *Atemschaukel* rose to her expectations. Radisch begins by praising Müller's previous work and says: "Through her poetic linguistic creations, she found an especially haunting and exact literary avenue to the horrors of the past century." She continues with

disappointment that, “because of the very poetic methods for which Herta Müller is so famous, her new novel about the post-war period is feeble and flat.”

Radisch seeks to find an explanation for the “feeble and flat” nature of the book by pointing out that, unlike her other works; this is the first in which Müller writes about a subject that she did not personally experience. Like Köhler, Radisch also makes a comparison to Imre Kertész, Primo Levi and others. She states: “it is no small adventure to attempt a lyrically expressionist Gulag novel in the ‘I’ perspective from second hand experience.” The critic also somewhat echoes the criticism of *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*. In this case, she does not state that the choice of the subject matter is a sign of stagnation, as earlier reviews had done, but here she does claim that “Müller’s word-world and poetic method have hardly changed.” Radisch concludes:

Here is an unserious and disconnected virtuosity, which does not go well with this serious author and her unquestionably deep indignation. The time of the Gulag literature, in which our breath fails us, has found its natural end which; it cannot be brought back with these sounds of harps or singing of angels in a second-hand store.

CHAPTER 8

NOBEL PRIZE (2009)

In 2009, Müller was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Swedish Academy. ("Herta Müller - Nobel Diploma"). The press release for the award stated: "The Nobel Prize in Literature for 2009 is awarded to the German author Herta Müller 'who, with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed'." (The Nobel Prize in Literature 2009 - Press Release). Professor Anders Olsson, a member of the Swedish Academy, delivered the presentation speech for the award on December 10, 2009. In his speech, Olsson pointed out the various reasons which led to the decision to award the Nobel Prize to Herta Müller. Due to the criticism of this decision by many, the presentation award was therefore not merely to praise her work, but also to justify it.

Olsson points out: "Almost everything she writes is about life under Ceaușescu's Romanian dictatorship, its fear and betrayal and constant surveillance." But he continues that this is not the sole extent of her work. Müller wrote about "a kind of dictatorship within a dictatorship" when she wrote about the German-speaking society she grew up in in her work, *Niederungen*. In this work and others, Olsson specifically points out *Barfüßiger Februar*, Müller explores the feeling of "alienation." This "exposition of alienation" in her work is not confined to the village, but it "widens into the Romanian dictatorship in general."

Olsson points out that Müller has experienced a double exile: she was a German in Romania until she emigrated and became a German from Romania after she emigrated. Her background gave her two languages “and from this situation she learned at an early stage to compare, to turn and twist words to extract new meanings.” Whereas many commentators, especially from the English-language area, seemed to find that Müller’s style detracted from her story, Olsson feels that these are deeply connected. “Her individuality as a narrator resides in just that ability to marry poetry’s density with the feel for detail in prose. She does this in crystal-clear syntax, where every clause demands our attention.” He concluded his speech by addressing Müller directly; he praised her “courage in uncompromisingly repudiating provincial repression and political terror. It is for the artistic value in that opposition that you merit this prize.”

CHAPTER 9

POST-PRIZE COMMENTS AND CRITICS

After the Nobel Prize was announced on October 8, 2009, critics from around the world quickly raced to publish articles about the decision. Some papers, such as *The New York Times*, published multiple articles. Many of Müller's books, above all in the English-language media, were reviewed again.

German-Language Reception

Reactions to the prize in Germany were surprisingly mixed about the award. Prominent literary figures took different positions, while Germany's most highly regarded literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki decided not to comment on the prize at all ("Literaturnobelpreisträger: Wer Reich-Ranickis Gnade findet."). Nobel Prize Winner Günter Grass stated that he was "very satisfied" by the decision, even though his personal favorite Amos Oz was not the winner ("Herta Müller: Nobelpreis für das Drama ihres Lebens"). Many critics in the Federal Republic were quick to judge the award and these opinions were not as positive as would be expected considering that Herta Müller had already won a number of literary prizes for both her German-language works as well as the English translations and that she was the thirteenth German-language author to win the prize. In contrast, even though Müller wrote in German and had lived for decades in Germany, the press in Romania was ecstatic that the Romanian-born author received the prize ("Reaktionen aus Rumänien"). Other German-language reviews in Austria and Switzerland were equally positive.

Writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Thomas Steinfeld delivered an interesting analysis of the award. Specifically, while Steinfeld begins the article with a very negative remark, he seemingly backtracks by redefining the purpose of the Nobel Prize for literature. Steinfeld's very first sentence seems like a condemnation: "It is now probable that readers and literary critics will have to separate themselves from one of their favorite beliefs for now on, namely that the Nobel Prize for Literature is a reward for the best authors and the best works." Clearly, Steinfeld, in contrast to the Nobel Committee, doesn't include Herta Müller under the category of "best authors."

However, Steinfeld's qualification of that first sentence begins immediately. After immediately stating that Herta Müller is "absolutely not" a bad writer, he also says, "She is, for good reason, confident enough to accept that others will again ask for Philip Roth and Tomas Tranströmer, in other words for truly great writers." He does not actually discuss Müller's talents in any detail, but rather he focuses more on her background and stories. Müller is a German from Romania, specifically the Banat. This is a region which is an "interface between two or even three worlds, the Romanian, the Austro-Hungarian and the German. In Herta Müller, the pre-Cold War divisions in Europe are still alive." Steinfeld calls her a "geographically and culturally integrated author." Therefore, it is not a question, or issue, of ability that Steinfeld finds important, rather that "the Swedish Academy has a very strong conviction about what type of art should be rewarded: World Literature, where the emphasis is not on the word 'literature,' but rather on 'world'." In a strong contrast to the beginning of the article,

Steinfeld concludes on an absolutely positive note. “Hers is world literature – and when the Swedish Academy thereby obliges Herta Müller, so much the better for everyone.”

In *Der Spiegel* commentaries also argued that the prize was correctly awarded, due to the political considerations. Ulrich Baron stated:

More interesting than the argument over the prize-worthiness of the awardee, which has blazed up in the face of her recently release novel *Atemschaukel*, is that the choice goes to a woman, for whom German is both her native-language and also the language of a minority.

While Baron does mention Müller’s “child-like word magic,” referring to her neologism such as “Herztier” or “Atemschaukel,” he focuses more on the themes of her works, including life under totalitarianism, emigrating to a new homeland, or the plight of ethnic-Germans who were sent to labor camps after the Second World War.

Baron also argues, like other German-language commentators, that the Nobel Prize was justified simply because of who Müller is.

The decision of the Nobel Prize Committee this year has something original, because it foils the argument over which country and author now has its turn, as they gave the prize to an author who, in her own manner, stands and writes between national boundaries and for herself.

Baron then turns to the political ramifications of the prize and how it should be received, namely as a call to rethink the definition of “Mitteleuropa” (Central Europe).

This could be a signal to introduce a new Central European concept, which was thrown out by the Yugoslavian tragedy and EU expansion. A concept in which identity is not given by national states, but rather it is acknowledged through cultural ties. If the Nobel Prize can accomplish this, then one must thank Herta Müller for it.

Also writing in *Der Spiegel*, author Ilija Trojanow took a different, but also political, perspective. Trojanow looks at Müller’s efforts to deal with the communist past.

With every book, Herta Müller fights against forgetting, against the furor of the cover-ups and trivializations, which have ruled the East of Europa since 1989. Unfortunately this attitude has also achieved the upper hand in the West, as shown by the uncritical selection of the communist bureaucrat Irina Bokowa as UNESCO Director-General.

Trojanow not only praises the committee for its honoring of Müller not just because of the author’s efforts to raise awareness of the horrors of communism, but also because of the signal it sends to others. “Working through the communist past is existentially important and will not be completed for a long time to come.

The Prize rewards a stubborn and courageous literary work and encourages those who seek to go similar ways.”

The Nobel Prize was also generally greeted with enthusiasm in Austria and Switzerland. Writing in *Der Standard*, Stefan Gmünder was very supportive of the decision (Gmünder). Herta Müller is a, “linguistically formidable, multifaceted author, whose writings do not just work through the post-war period, but chronicles the history of the former East Bloc.” Gmünder takes points out the consistency of Müller’s artistic work, “Herta Müller has remained true not only to her themes, but also to her stranger’s perspective and a pain which is formulated in a precise and knife-sharp language.”

Writing in *Die Presse*, one of the “last remaining German poets in Romania,” Eginald Schlattner, wrote of his joy for a fellow Romanian-German writer: “Herta Müller, Nobel Prize, it takes ones breath away. But there is still enough air for joy and shared joy.” While pointing out that many in Romania, including himself, were excited that the terror of Ceausescu’s regime was finally receiving international attention through her works, Schlattner focuses more on Müller as a person: “A tremendous strength flows through the even so fragile Herta Müller in word and gesture, she expresses a stubborn boldness by naming things by their true name, by hook or by crook. Around her is always an immune space of freedom.” Schlattner states that, most of all, he is impressed by Müller’s ability to transform her youthful experiences into true literature: “Many have experienced the prevalent trauma of dictator and attempted to deal with it through literature. And they failed.” He concludes not only that Müller is a worthy

recipient, but that for someone with a limited regional dialect from a “small village in the Banat to break with all canonical limitations and to receive in the noblest palace in Europa the highest literature prize from the hand of a king, from Nitzkydorf to Stockholm, that is an accomplishment, it is a fairy tale, and it is mercy.”

In contrast to this deeply moving voice of support, another commentator in *Die Presse* took a nasty, and perhaps the most, negative view. Norbert Mayer begins, “On Friday, after I put one of her sadness-filled books back on the shelf, I thought: ‘That is clearly not art!’” Mayer proceeds to argue that the Nobel Prize is little more than a joke, since “almost any other author would have been better,” and it should be treated as such. “Is it really worth being rewarded financially for a hundred years of loneliness at a writing desk by a dubious dynamite manufacturer?” Mayer proposes that the Nobel Committee should base their future selections simply on the first sentence of a book: “Since, honestly, the first impression almost never disappoints.” This criticism is much more similar to that in the English-language press, where commentators were shocked by selection of the “unknown” Herta Müller. However, even many of the German commentators who supported the decision focused more on the political meaning of the prize.

Mayer’s criticism is supported though by another commentator, Anne-Catherine Simon, in *Die Presse*, which, while acknowledging that Müller was wildly acclaimed in German-language areas, argues that the Nobel Committee is constantly, and unfortunately, “pushed to take political positions” by Alfred Nobel’s requirement that the literature prize be awarded for “idealism”

(Simon). Of course, Simon also reminds readers that “Nobel didn’t want to sweeten the twilight of famous author’s lives, he wanted to assure the financial independence of authors who still have much to accomplish.” Therefore, she concludes, “Herta Müller is a comfortable choice – the majority of previous recipients have been too old for the prize.”

Writing in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Andrea Köhler wrote a much more typical commentary (Köhler, “Das Alphabet der Angst”). “It is the will to survive which permeates word and flesh which makes her books so vital.” Köhler doesn’t just focus on the books, as do most commentators; she also praises Müller’s poetry and essays. She states, “her essays belong among the best of all those in this genre.” Unlike many of the other supportive critics who are concerned primarily with the political meaning of the works, Köhler praises the combination of form and substance. “It is a fragile beauty, always rebalanced with the terror, which is produced in Herta Müller’s sentences: a balance in which the horrifying does not rule, rather the horrifying beauty.”

English-Language Reception

On October 9, 2009, *The New York Times* ran three separate articles on Müller. In addition to an article with excerpts from *The Land of Green Plums*, *The Passport*, *The Appointment* and *Traveling on One Leg*, this paper also published two commentaries on the decision to give the prize to Herta Müller. While neither of these articles were particularly negative, they were clearly not supportive.

Motoko Rich and Nicholas Kulish wrote in *The New York Times* about Müller and sought to introduce her to readers of the paper. While explaining her

past and background, the authors repeatedly point out that, “Müller is a relative unknown outside of literary circles in Germany [...]. Even in Germany, Ms. Müller is not well known” (C25). To support their position, the authors quote Volker Weidermann, a critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “She’s not one of these public trumpeters – or drum-beaters, like Grass. She’s more reserved.” It is not clear how this quote supports their position; even the authors point out that Müller was awarded the International Dublin IMPAC Literary Prize in 1998 and that their colleague Peter Filkins reviewed *The Appointment* for *The New York Times Book Review*. In addition to this odd statement that she is “relatively unknown,” the authors also discuss Müller’s style. Lyn Marven, from the University of Liverpool is quoted, as follows: “It’s an odd disjunction to write about traumatic experiences living under a dictatorship in a very poetic style. It’s not what we expect, certainly” (qtd. in Rich and Kulish C25).

Also writing in *The New York Times*, Dwight Garner discussed the Nobel Prize for Literature more generally, and writes: “The winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature isn’t always a bolt-out-of-the-blue surprise, a writer whose work is known only to an elite fraction of American readers. It only seems that way.” (C25). However, Garner says that awarding the prize to Müller “caught more readers than usual off guard.” As with Rich and Kulish, he also points out that only five of her many books have been translated into English. After briefly discussing Müller, Garner discussed the other contenders for the Nobel Prize, above all the American contenders. The last American to win was Toni Morrison in 1993. The article also quotes “Nobel secretary Horace Engdahl” who hurt

American feelings when stating: “There is powerful literature in all big cultures, but you can’t get away from the fact that Europe is still the center of the literary world, not the United States.” Despite stating that the committee may have “put political considerations ahead of writerly ones,” Garner concludes, “Herta Müller’s selection may seem like another Nobel head-scratcher, but she is an often inspiring one.”

The confusion amongst English-language commentators seems centered on the unknown character of Müller’s works. In the *Washington Post*, Mary Jordan began her article on the Nobel Prize, “Herta Who?” (Jordan C1). However, this was not the only criticism, as many pointed out that it had been years since an American had won the prize. Both above-mentioned articles in *The New York Times* discussed the fact that prize was awarded to yet another European. Jordan’s article devotes a significant amount of space to discussing this, pointing out that “only 11 Americans” had won. Jordan also quotes disappointed Americans. “It’s like they are in some other universe,” a prominent editor and writer¹⁵ in New York said about the 18-member Nobel jury. He said passing over the likes of [Philip] Roth, [Japanese writer] Haruki Murakami, and [British writer] Salman Rushdie diminishes the prize.” Smaller newspapers in the United States decided to write critical responses; even a full year after Müller was awarded the prize. Writing in response to the 2010 Nobel Prize awarded to Vargas Llosa, Daniel O’Connor wrote in a university newspaper, “finally, a worthy recipient.”

15. He does not reveal his identity.

This criticism was not confined to America. In *The Guardian*, Tibor Fischer wrote a very harsh critique of Müller's works ("Review: *The Passport* and *Nadirs* by Herta Müller"). After declaring his sympathy for "anyone who grew up in Ceausescu's Romania," he dives into arguably the most critical review of Müller's works in an English-language publication: "Of all the writers who've won the Nobel Prize, Müller must have the most rudimentary prose style. The citation [...] refers to the 'frankness of prose.' With the possible exception of Dan Brown [...], prose doesn't come any franker than this." Seemingly intent on being as critical as possible, Fischer also states that her works, "read like Thomas Hardy abridged for six-year-olds." He concludes that Hungarian writer György Dragoman's book *The White King* was a much better book for readers looking for something "that replicates the grim lunacy of Ceausescu's reign." *The White King* was also reviewed by Fischer in *The Guardian* ("Review: Tales of Lunacy").

Fischer's negative opinion was not shared by others at *The Guardian*. Immediately after the prize was announced, the paper ran a fairly positive article on Müller. In this earlier piece, Alison Flood and Kate Connolly quoted members of the Nobel Committee and the German Book Prize Academy who stated that the prize was "completely fitting" (3). After the Fischer review, *The Guardian* also published two letters in defense of Müller. One was written by Pete Ayrton, from *Serpent's Tail*,¹⁶ who stated that it was "depressing" that Fischer had unfavorably compared Müller's work to that of Dragoman (15). Ayrton points out that Dragoman himself had praised Müller:

16. The publishing house of *The Passport*.

Her perception is extremely precise, and these precise observations create a relentlessly oppressive, sometimes Kafkaesque, yet very real world, which sucks its readers in, never to release them again, and shows them from the inside how fear drives people to madness.

Another reader of *The Guardian* also commented, “Müller’s prose style is anything but ‘rudimentary’.” This reader wrote that Müller’s *Herztier* “drew me into the nightmare of Ceausescu’s Romania,” and that she looked forward to reading more works from the German author (15).

Even other reviewers at *The Guardian* seemed to disagree with Fischer. In a review of *The Land of Green Plums* published in *The Guardian* a month after Fischer’s comments on the Nobel Prize and Müller’s works, Nicholas Lezard found Müller’s work very satisfactory (19). While he concedes that Müller’s prose is “simple at the level of the sentence,” the language “is shifty, blurred, to the point where at times we are left unsure what exactly is going on – a deliberate flight from causation, quite understandable in a country where everyone (even, we learn, the horses) has been driven mad by fear.” Interestingly for an English-language commentator, since many seem to think that Müller’s style detracts from her stories, Lezard states: “The mood of the novel is more important than the plot, and an air of enigma prevails throughout.” He concludes that “*The Land of Green Plums* works hauntingly, disturbingly well.” To be sure, Fischer looked at *Nadirs* and *The Passport*, while Lezard looked solely at *The Land of Green Plums*. This may account for some of the discrepancy between the two reviews.

CONCLUSION

While Herta Müller may not have been a household name before she won the Nobel Prize, she was not “unknown” in either the German or English speaking literary communities. She won numerous awards for her works in Germany, and also won the prestigious IMPAC Dublin award for *The Land of Green Plums*. To ask “Herta Who?”, as Mary Jordan did in *The Washington Post*, is to betray certain arrogance. This is not to say that those who were unaware of Müller before the prize were ignorant; rather it is arrogant to think that the winner of a Nobel Prize must somehow win a popularity contest and top the bestseller charts. A serious discussion involves discussing the art that is being praised, and fortunately critics have done this.

As has been shown in the above analysis of published reviews, neither the German or English language communities have reached any consensus on the merits of Herta Müller’s works. There are reviewers in both who are fascinated and who are disappointed. There are, however, some general trends. English-language commentators emphasize that Müller’s stories are important and that raising the awareness of the suffering under Ceausescu is noble. Many of these same commentators also express regret that the style of those works is less direct or clear than they would have hoped for. Their German-language counterparts are also very supportive of the discussion of communism; however, they are also generally more accepting and enthusiastic about the artistic nature of the works.

There are naturally differences and agreement regardless of who is writing the review or where it is written. One common theme across linguist boundaries is

that Müller's work exposes readers to the suffering in an oft neglected region of Europe. Many commentators hope that the Nobel Prize will play a large role in raising this awareness. It remains to be seen what long term affect the prize will actually have. One early sign is the number of books set to be translated into English. Metropolitan Books, which has already published *The Land of Green Plums* and *The Appointment* in the United States is planning on releasing *Atemschaukel* in September 2011 as *Everything I Possess, I Carry With Me* and *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* in September 2012 as *The Fox Was Always a Hunter* (Rich C2).

This thesis has looked at the German-language reviews for *Atemschaukel*, it will be interesting to see how critics respond to this first translation now that Müller won the Nobel Prize. Further research on the reception of Herta Müller, specifically in the Romanian language media, would be both insightful and rewarding.¹⁷

17. See a partial list of Romanian language reviews as a basis for future projects in Appendix B.

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APPENDIX A

LITERARY PRIZES WON BY HERTA MÜLLER

Förderpreis des Literaturkreises “Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn” (1981);
Debütpreis des Rumänischen Schriftstellerverbandes (1982);
Literaturpreis des Verbandes der Kommunistischen Jugend Rumäniens (1982);
Aspekte-Literaturpreis (1984);
Literaturförderpreis der Freien Hansestadt Bremen (1985);
Rauriser Literaturpreis (1985);
Ricarda-Huch-Preis (1987);
Preis der Henning-Kaufmann-Stiftung (1989);
Marieluise-Fleißer-Preis (1989);
Roswitha-Gedenkmedaille der Stadt Bad Gandersheim (1990);
Literaturpreis Kranich mit dem Stein (1991);
Villa-Massimo-Stipendium (1991);
Kritikerpreis (1992);
Kleist-Preis (1994);
Europäischer Literaturpreis Aristeion (1995);
Stadtschreiberin von Bergen-Enkheim (1995);
Franz-Nabl-Preis (1997); Impac Dublin Literary Award (1998);
Ida-Dehmel-Literaturpreis (1998);
Franz-Kafka-Literaturpreis (1999);
Cicero-Rednerpreis (2001);
Carl-Zuckmayer-Medaille (2002);
Joseph-Breitbach-Preis (2003) zusammen mit Christoph Meckel und Harald
Weinrich;

Literaturpreis der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (2004);
Berliner Literaturpreis (2005);
Würth-Preis für Europäische Literatur (2005);
Walter-Hasenclever-Preis (2006);
Ehrengabe der Heinrich-Heine-Gesellschaft Düsseldorf (2009);
Nobelpreis für Literatur (2009);
Hoffmann-von-Fallersleben-Preis (2010).¹⁸

18. This list is taken from the KLG (*Das Kritische Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*)

APPENDIX B

MATERIAL FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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