

Müller, Heiner. *Krieg ohne Schlachten. Leben in zwei Diktaturen*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992. 426 pp.

Heiner Müller's autobiography has evoked passionate criticism in the German press, much of which focused on the carelessness of the editing. Fritz Raddatz shows the least patience in his *Zeit* review, damning the final product as "ein schlechtes Buch" full of "endloser Banalitäten" (all review citations are from July 1992). He charges the book to be without a "Gesprächsregisseur." This irritation is echoed by Gregor Edelmann in the *Bild-Zeitung*: "Ein trauriges Buch. Abgearbeitet wie eine Ehepflicht: müde, lustlos, nebenher...Es hätte nicht geschrieben werden sollen, dieses Buch."

Theater heute, on the other hand, allotted twelve magazine pages for excerpts from the book, letting Müller's conversational text speak for itself. *Der Spiegel*, too, gave ten pages to excerpts, qualifying the work as "eine Art Autobiographie...Es ist kein literarisches Werk und will es nicht sein. Müller hat einfach erzählt, vor laufendem Tonbandgerät..." Joachim Kaiser in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* sees this lax style as a plus because of the book's freedom from a "beklemmenden Dokumentationsstil."

One might think of this very long interview as the magnum opus of a genre that Müller mastered in the 1980s. All kinds of interviews have been compiled into numerous volumes that have sold well, and much of the scholarship on Müller in the last decade has drawn from these interviews. Thus it seems appropriate that this post-playwright would utilize for his autobiography the genre that made him popular with a much more diverse audience than did his *Horatier* or *Phädra* texts.

Perhaps this book is merely a symptom of the new pressure on East German writers to respond to market demand. It was good timing to market these memoirs before the news surfaced of Müller's "IM" association with the "Stasi" because now he will be expected to write a sequel--the single phrase on the back cover, "EINE AUTOBIOGRAPHIE," leaves room for another one.

The omission of an explanation for his cooperation with the "Stasi" has led at least to raised eyebrows, since he does talk about his victimization by them. Müller's warning of a post-Wende "Dämonisierung der Staatssicherheit" also implies that he believes it to have had some redeeming qualities. What Müller really thinks about the role of the secret police in GDR society or in his own life, we do not learn from his autobiography. Perhaps we could have, but Müller admitted later that he cut any

potentially incriminating passages about the "Stasi" before the book went to press. This absence is particularly glaring since much of what Müller chooses to reveal in his memoirs has been in print before. In writing--or dictating--the next life story, Müller will hopefully be more engaged and more honest about his backstage activity. Most will agree with Edelmann, the Berlin critic who knows the author and his work as well as anyone does, that this will hopefully not be the last work from Müller.

If we already anticipate a second volume, what then does the first autobiography offer? For one, it provides a manageable introduction to the cryptic texts of this elusive artist. The initiated Müller-fan, too, will find some new facts in these work exposes. It is precisely in those passages where the writer talks about his work that the text shines.

Whether because of the book's style or the changing times, this riddling figure shows a more relaxed and intimate side of himself. Talking about his 1975 trip to Texas, for example, he relates impressions of his first drink in an all-black bar. Then, as if to pull back from such intimacy, he makes fun of the young female performers of his *Mausier* premier who mark the text with "Statements" to remind the audience that revolution per se is bad. This story is concluded with the non-sequitur: "Die amerikanische Bevölkerung zieht, statistisch gesehen, am häufigsten um."

It is such disconnected generalizations that make parts of the narration seem excessively reductive. Müller's familiar biting humor sometimes slips into defensiveness, or as Edelmann has noted--revenge: "Rache an...DDR-Funktionären, Autorenkollegen, an Genossen, Feinden von gestern...da wird er kleinlich." Perhaps the clichés and surface summaries result from the fact that this work simply attempts too much. The brief "Entstehungsgeschichten" to every work are interspersed with biographical vignettes, anecdotes about famous people he knew, and commentary on topics from the politics of the Prenzlauer Berg scene to that of the "Kulturministerium." Edelmann criticizes the author for retreating to the level of mere recollection: "Kein Denken mehr. Bloß noch Erinnerung. Das ist die fatale Schwäche des Buchs." Even though Müller does not flee this *Krieg ohne Schlacht* into self-imposed exile in the West, he has, according to Edelmann, retreated to the "erste Kneipe hinter der Front."

Much more than a biography, this work is a document about writing and publishing in the GDR--and how it was promoted or hindered. "Ein großartiges Dokument," says Raddatz, because it

tells the real story about "das Entstehen von Literatur in einer Diktatur." Müller holds back little in describing the injustices of the Party's control over everything in print and on stage. The lengthy account of the scandal surrounding the banning of *Die Umsiedlerin* in September 1961 and the subsequent burning of the text at an official function initiates the documentation of an unwritten chapter in GDR history. Also interesting in this context are the letters, notes, and speeches that Müller chose to include in the 52 pages of appended documents. Müller's account shows why he coined for the state the title of "Diktatur der Inkompetenz."

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book lies in what it reveals about the process of "Gegenwartsbewältigung." Certainly not the first post-1989 memoir by a high profile GDR personality, it is nonetheless one of the more important ones. Even with the absence of some topics and the abridging of others, Müller gives insight into some of the choices that brought benefits for compromise--whether it was giving in to the "request" to reject his Lessing Prize from the city of Hamburg in exchange for a visa to visit his expelled wife, or forfeiting his contact with Wolf Biermann in the early 1970s in order not to raise suspicions that could hinder his own work.

Müller lets us in on some of his regrets, such as when he retreated from the opportunity to lend support to the 1987 demonstrators for the "Freiheit der Andersdenkenden," or when he brushed off the seriousness of the November 4th "Alex-demo" by reading a flyer that a stranger handed him. Although Müller supported the call for independent trade unions, most of the audience found the plea half-hearted and out of place, hardly more than big joke when read by a privileged playwright. Müller defended himself against accusations of having taken the easy way out with an engaging essay published in *Neues Deutschland*, where he argues for "die Ausformulierung der vorhandnen Differenzen" and "Dialog mit der lange schweigenden oder Fremdsprachen redenden Mehrheit der jahrzehntelang Unterprivilegierten und im Namen des Sozialismus Entrechteten."

As part of his attempt to understand his own role in supporting a system that he knew not to be congruent with his socialist ideals, he also evaluates the participation/resistance of other main players in the art scene, remembering well those who could have supported his cause against the Party's attacks--but did not. He determines with regret that the revolutionary in an industrial society is like a dog on the autobahn. Whether the dog actually

accomplishes anything before it gets wiped out, Müller argues, depends on how many dogs gather on the autobahn. In this semi-reflective autobiography, Müller seems to question now and then why there were not more dogs on the autobahn. But his final work is expressed on the cover itself: the front shows the contemplative artist holding his imported cigar, unbothered by dirty fingernails, and the back captures him blowing smoke in the face of any reader who insists on taking him too seriously.

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