

The Metamorphosis of Fear: Herta Müller's Invention of Perception

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Abstract

This paper investigates the multifarious origins of fear in the formation of Herta Müller the person and their resulting influences on her literary expressions. The various kinds of fear molded her ways of perception which in turn triggered the forming process of her poetics. Both her ontological fear and her fears caused by various secular authorities are elaborated, before an analysis of her creation of metaphors unfolds. It is concluded that her literary metamorphosis of fear as a strategy to counteract the destructive forces of the latter is one of the key characteristics of the uniqueness of her poetical practice.

Key words: Fear; Invention of perception; Taboo; Metaphor; Metamorphosis

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INTRODUCTION

An interview in 1998 by Beverley Driver Eddy with the German Nobel laureate Herta Müller is titled "Die Schule der Angst" [The School of Fear], for "fear", as this title suggests, is unarguably the central theme stringing up almost all of Müller's literary practices. Just as Müller states in this interview: "Wenn man so lange Lebensangst hatte, oder Todesangst —es ist ja desselbe,

seltsamweise—die Angst ist der unheimliche Meister der Wahrnehmung. Wenn man Aengste eingeuebt hat, weil man damit leben musste, gehen sie nicht mehr weg. ...Ich glaube, die Angst, die still haelt, ist am gefaehrlichsten.... Ich habe mich immer darum bemueht, dass die Angst sich bewegt....Den Kopf in der Angst bewegen lernen,egal wie es kommt, damit du es aushaeltst....Im Grunde hat das Schreiben mich abgestossen. Ich glaube, das Schreiben hat mich erwischt, als mir gar nichts anderes mehr uebrigblieb. Und das Schreiben habe ich damals nur angefangen, um mir selber zu versichern, dass die Angst laufen lernt", [When one has been having the fear of life, or that of death —with the two strangely being the same— for so long, fear is the sinister master of perception. When one got used to fears, for one must live with them, they do not go away. ...I believe, the fear that holds itself still is the most perilous one....I have always been trying hard to make the fear to move itself, to learn to move the head in the grip of fear, not fussing about where the fear comes, in order to endure it. ... Basically writing bumps into me. I believe writing has captured me when nothing else was left for me. At that time I began to write just to make sure that the fear learns to run.] (Eddy, p.332) "fear" of life and death became such dominant existential experience that ways to "mobilize" the fear, that is to say, to go around with the fear, instead of letting fear happen to oneself without a countermeasure, have to be wrought for survival. It is also clearly stated in the quotation above that writing has become the only way for Müller of self-preservation. Writing bumps into her, as she said.

As a Banat-Swabian, a misfit living in the totalitarian Romania, an ethnic German immigrant in the Federal Republic of Germany, and, last but not the least, a woman, she has physically and psychologically suffered oppressions from various forces. "Fear", as the inevitable result of her personal experiences, however, is not merely confined to the sheer empirical sphere. For Müller, "fear" is more at the core of her ontological existence, an innate

and pre-set mechanism which defines her unique ways of perception of the realities. The fear, both metaphysical and physical, has been wrought into her literary works in highly metaphorical and surreal ways which can be extremely abstruse and profoundly demanding for critical interpretations, let alone the understanding of the common reader. A mere citing of several titles of her works will suffice to justify this statement: *Herztier* (*Heart-animal*), *Barfussiger February* (*Barefoot February*), *Eine warme Kartoffel ist ein warmes Bett* (*A Warm Potato is a Warm Bed*), *Atemschaukel* (*The Breath Swing*). In all the above cited titles, unlikely combinations of images thrust a sense of oddity and surrealism into the existing mental reality of the human consciousness, so jutting and inconvenient as a grit in the soft flesh of a nacre. This stimulant forces the reader to muster up all his/her resources of interpretation to digest, and, along the way, through the gateway of her poetics, venture into the very nature of her psyche, which is another unique segment of humanity. This paper is set to explore the source of her existentialistic fear, the accentuation of this metaphysical fear by various secular forces along the way of her growth, the resultant means of perception, and its various poetical metamorphoses in her literary works.

1. GELBER MAIS UND KEINE ZEIT- HERTA MÜLLER'S ONTOLOGICAL FEAR

In her 2011 essay collection *Immer derselbe Schnee und immer derselbe Onkel* [*Always the Same Snow, Always the Same Uncle*], Müller, 20 years after her initial focused elucidation on her poetic mechanisms in *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel* [*The Devil is Sitting in the Mirror*], continues along the line to illuminate her unique ways of perception. In the essay titled *Gelber Mais und keine Zeit* [*Yellow Maize and No Time*], a line in a short poem in her 2009 novel *Atemschaukel*, she retraces the origin of the novel and explains in details her ways of creating words as her unique practice of poetics. The late Romanian-German writer Oskar Pastior, the prototype of the protagonist Leo Auberg in *Atmeschaukel*, helped her probe into the life in Gulag labor camps into which hundreds of thousands of ethnical Romanian German were forced in 1945 by the Soviet Union military authorities as punishment for their cooperation with Nazi Germany. Müller's mother was also an internee, an experience shared by her village folks and rendered into a taboo because of the brutalities, the inhuman treatments, as well as the gnawing shame they were subject to in labor camps. As Müller set out to expose this almost obscure chapter of history, Pastior arrived on the scene as a guide. They were once travelling to Lana in Südtirol along a highway through mountain areas where fir trees shot up everywhere and they began a conversation. As Müller describes, it is for her a conversation out of nowhere. "Aus dem Nichts

begann ein Gespräch. Mein Nichts stieß auf Oskar Pastiors Kindheitslandschaft." [Out of nowhere began the conversation. My obscurity bumped into Oskar Pastior's childhood landscape.](Müller, 2011, p.127) At this very point, a trace of ontological speculation creeps into the text, for Pastior's childhood landscape of wooded mountains is alien to the consciousness of Müller as a child brought up in a flatland. For the latter, "Tannen sind immer fertig gruen. Sie tun gar nichts, es sind die langweiligsten Baeume, die es gibt..." [Pine trees are always readily green. They do not do anything, and they are the dullest trees that have ever been existing...] (Müller, 2011, p.127) Then, Müller compares her reaction to Christmas trees with that of Pastior's. Their reactions seem differ drastically, yet both are justified in their own right. The intensity of the perception of fear in both cases, namely Müller's repulse to the shining wires on the tree which reminded her of the glistening intestines in the cut-open stomach of a domestic animal, and Pastior's atheistic and desperate grasp on that shabbily improvised Christmas tree out of wool and iron wires which raised him above the zero point of existence and kept him in hope of survival, transforms as well as defines their respective psyches in terms of ontology. In other words, Müller's core of existence is molded into form by events at the center of which looms the grim face of violence, while Pastior's by details which poise on the thin line between being and none-being. In this sense, both her fear and his struggle acquire the same status of ontology in their respective individual existences, which in turn, as they are members of the human community, at least expand our knowledge of the richness and depth of human experience.

Müller further examines this ontological fear by probing into her childhood experience of human mortality and transience against the seemingly unending being of time and nature. For Müller, as against Pastior whose childhood daily presence is wooded mountains, the forming and defining force at the very beginning of her life is the flat landscape extending in all directions boasting its infinity and immortality. Müller, standing in the corn field with an endlessly stretching picture of no purpose, began to strongly feel the limitedness of her existence. "Kindheitlandschaften sind die ersten grossen Bilder, die uns mit unserem Körper konfrontieren." [The childhood landscape is the first vast picture confronting our physical existences.] (Müller, 2011, p.128) In contrast to the everlasting and rigorous presence of Nature, Müller realized the fragility and transience of the human body and the very word "life." Even though as a child such word as ephemerality would not be part of the cognitive vocabulary, the feel of passing already eats into the essence of being. As a result, "das Landschaftsbild meiner Kindheit ist die erste grosse Niederlage, die ich kenne," [my childhood landscape is the first great fiasco I've

ever known] (Müller, 2011, p.128); that is, at the very start of a life, there is no trace of promise and liveliness but a realization of doom and gloom. This is a rather unordinary childhood not for its gloominess as such, but for its understanding of the gloomy nature of being, her ontological epiphany: life is a failure even before it begins to unfold. This predestinedness may not be the necessary consequence of her self-placement in the epitome of eternity, the infinite flat landscape as she implies; it could be the logical aftermath of the fate of her people and the tragedy of her family life. Nevertheless, the resultant fear is so essential to her life that to call it ontological is not far-fetched because, as demonstrated in the following parts of this paper, fear is always a loyal companion, a shadow shadowing her existence ever since her budding consciousness.

The line “*Gelber Mais und keine Zeit*” [yellow maize and no time] is an illuminating example of this ontologicality. After the death of Pastior, Müller retraced the genesis of this line as a fruit of their collaboration. She finds it hard to attribute the two parts of the line respectively to herself and Pastior. This contemplation is itself a metaphor of a mingling of her and his fears. Her childhood ontological fear germinating in the cornfield and his labor camp fear of being thrown into an emptiness without the dimension of time, a state of forever labor and death as the only destiny, come into a unity, where the perpetual cycling life of plants and the dominating force of the world, the non-time, form the ultimate basis for our fear of existence and the resulting pose of resistance, the only futile but existential struggle we can perform against the absurdity of the world.

2. THE TABOO OF PERCEPTION AND THE STRATEGIES AGAINST FEAR

In her essay “*Tabus der Wahrnehmung: Reflexion und Geschichte in Herta Müllers Prosa*” [Taboo of Perception: Reflection and History in Herta Müller’s Prose Writing], Karin Bauer studies the basis of Müller’s poetics which is condensed into one phrase: *Die Erfindung der Wahrnehmung* [The Invention of Perception]. This nomina nova was first launched by Müller in her inaugural speech at the Poetik-Gastdozentur at the University of Paderborn in December 1989. Ever since then, poetic practices in this vein can be seen in almost all of her literary output, including the 2009 novel *Atemschaukel* celebrated by some critics as a long-awaited departure from Müller’s usual thematic domain. As is discussed in the first section of this paper, fear, as an ontological basis of her existence and the prototype of her socialization, will unarguably be expected to persist in her writing. Her pattern of perception, the basic tool of cognition, is for the same reason undoubtedly rooted in her childhood tackling with fear.

As is mentioned in passing in the previous section, Müller’s fear, besides the ontological impact of the flat landscape, may be attributed to her ethnic origin. She was born in the year 1953 in Nitzkydorf, a Catholic German settler village in Banat, Romania. 200 and some years after the first settlement, this community is already dilapidated in that the population is shrinking fast and the local culture sees no continuity maintenance. Both cultural and political reasons- “...dem nationalistischen Deutschtum, dem kleinbuergerlichen Traditionalismus und religioesen Aberglauben der Eltern und Grosseltern...und der repressiven kommunistischen Politik” [the nationalistic Germanness, the petit bourgeois traditionalism, the religious superstitions of parents and great-parents,...and the repressive communistic politics] (Bauer, p.259) contribute to this falling-apart which is also contemplated by Müller as the inevitable aftereffect of cultural conservativeness and bigotry. In the interview with Beverley Driver Eddy, Müller takes the Banat-Swabian folklores as an example to demonstrate the fanatic preservation of the German identity of the local people as an ethnic minority. “... für mich ist der Gedanke unheimlich, dass Menschen vor dreihundert Jahren mit einem Repertoire in eine Gegend kamen, und disese Repertoire nichts verloren und nichts dazugekriegt hat.” [For me the idea is so absurd that a people came to a region three hundred years ago with a repertoire of folklores, and this repertoir remains the same and has nothing added to it.] This ultra-conservative life is called by Müller as “Ein Leben in einer Konserve [A life in a can].” (Eddy, p.335) Despite the ongoing of time and history, despite Nazism and Stalinism, “wenn dreihundert Jahre lang bei einer Beerdigung immer die gleiche Melodie von den Dorfmusikanten gespielt wird, und die Todesursache - Krieg, Gefängnis, Nierensteine oder Suizid – keine Rolle spielt, dann wird die Abwesenheit einer Gemeinschaft von sich selbst so trostlos, dass sie mich in Schrecken versetzt.” [When 300 years long the village musicians always played the same burial piece, and the causes of death, be it a war, an imprisonment, a kidney stone or a suicide, did not play a part, then the community’s estrangement to itself is so hopeless that it throws me into a great shock] (Eddy, p.335) The perverse clinging to the authenticity of tradition as such is the very reflection of the cultural insecurity of a settler group finding itself in alien and tumultuous surroundings, which is a common phenomenon in the study of diaspora. The Amish people in Pennsylvania go even further in the preservation of their original culture and religion. The Banat-Swabian’s specificity is that “(the) establishment of German communities in the Banat in some way resembled a colonial enterprise, involving establishment of German habitation structures and administrative programs in a land previously viewed as alien but that had been brought into the fold of Habsburg possessions.” (Haines & Marven,

p.35) This means they had a culturally and militarily strong fatherland as backup, for Germany was the land of Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Beethoven, Gauss, Hegel, Hölderlin, to name only a few of its colossal cultural achievements, as well as a dominant force in the life of Europe ever since the 1871 unification. This renders superiority and arrogance as “the local population of Serbs, Romanians, and Roma were depicted as benighted, uncultured savages.” (Haines & Marven, p.35) At the same time, the typical absolute power of the paterfamilias also contributes to the closeness and paralysis of family and social life. Above that, the eager participation on the Nazi side in the WWII (some 60,000 men serving in SS), the ensuing disgrace of defeat and forced labor in the Soviet Gulag, the postwar minority marginalization in a Romanian-dominant totalitarian country collectively added up to a prevailing aura of fiasco and indignity, especially epitomized in the domestic and communal violence and taboos. All of these are artistically reflected in her first book *Niederungen* [*Nadirs*], a collection of short sketches about the sinister and violence-infused village life.

This particular local minority culture created a network of taboos as a mechanism distancing its folk from direct perceptions of the reality which tends to be destructive to its cultural identity and psychological well-being. This protective mechanism is ironically in itself more destructive than the destruction it intends to fend off. *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel*, the very title of her first poetic self-reflection, is a remark her grandmother used to make to her as a warning when she was seen standing in front of the mirror and appreciating herself, a typical act of self-reflection. “Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel, sagt meine Grossmutter, wenn ich als Kind in den Spiegel schaute. Wenn ich leichtfuessig dastand, sogar ein bisschen froh mit mir, wer weiss weshalb, ich wusste damals schon, das wird nicht halten, wenn ich also vor dem Spiegel stand, vielleicht ganz leise summte, sagte meine Grossmutter: Den Vogel, der morgens singt, frisst die Katz.” [The devil is sitting in the mirror, said my grandmother, when as a kid I looked into the mirror. When I furtively stood in front of a mirror, a bit pleased with my reflection, perhaps quietly humming a tune, who knows why I even at that early age came to understand that it would not hold long, with my grandmother saying that the cat eats the bird who sings in the morning.] (Müller, 1991, p.22) The strangulation of personality and self-reflection is well exemplified by this scene where one's selfhood is threatened by a forbidding collective power embodied by the violence of the cat ready to prey on the one who dare articulate a sound to greet the beauty of life epitomized by the word “morning.” What is more horrible is that in such an enclosed tyrannical community even a seemingly innocent and harmless individual as the grandmother would unconsciously take up the task of surveillance. This 1984-scenario reappears when Müller later left Banat and began her life in the

bigger Romanian context where the Securitate enacted the cameras of the Big Brother. This striking abnormality in disguise of a well-intended warning is the true essence of a totalitarian society. As is quoted at the very beginning of Bauer's essay, Theodor Adorno rightly points out “Das Wahre und Bessere in jedem Volk ist wohl vielmehr, was dem Kollektivsubjekt nicht sich einfügt, womöglich ihm widersteht.” [The True and the Better of each folk is probably too much for the collective subject to adapt it self to, possibly because it they stand as its opposition.] The suppression of the true and the better, the birds articulating life under that threat of violence, therefore, has become the central conscious and unconscious collective efforts of a society founded upon an absolute power structure and a paranoid sense of insecurity.

The theme of taboo extends even further into the sheer fear of Leo Auberg in *Atemschaukel* as a yet-to-come-out homosexual. In the opening episode of the novel, Leo's fear of violating the taboo of sexuality - in his case an even more outrageous affair with a Romanian, a member of the “inferior race”-, the result of which is imprisonment and mysterious disappearance, and his irresistible craving for homosexual bliss form the utmost conflict torturing him which directly led to his abnormal elation as the news of deportation was confirmed. (Müller, 2009, pp.8-10) As a queer in an intolerant society, he was living under scrutiny even of the surrounding inanimate things such as the pattern of sunlight on the inner side of a pavilion, the reflections of things on the smooth floor of the foyer of the swimming pool, as he observed “Ich wollte aus dem Fingerhut der kleinen Stadt, wo alle Steine Augen hatten.” [I would like to get away from this thimble of small town where every stone had eyes.] (Müller, 2009, p.7) One illustrating example of his fear is when they had dinner at home, his mother ordered him not to stab potatoes with the fork, for the fork was intended for meat. In German, “meat” and “flesh” are the same word “Fleisch” which connotes carnality. This inadvertent order triggered great panic in Leo, for the constant fear of being caught had rendered him paranoid, a good example of the tormenting effect of taboos. (Müller, 2009, p.10) After he returned home from the Gulag labor camp, he got into a marriage as a camouflage. Only after he got to Austria did he begin to restore his real sexual orientation without the fear of being publicly persecuted. In this particular case, the real perception of one's sexuality as well as special form of existence is forbidden, even subject to capital punishment.

In order to perform resistance to the devastating effect of social and behavioral norms on the real core of selfhood, the subject must conjure up ways to dodge the deadly blows of taboos. Leo was absurdly elated to leave for the Gulag, and after the return, disguised his true self with a heterosexual marriage which he stepped out eagerly at the first chance coming his way. For Müller herself, initially as a child without Leo's “liberty”, the strategies

were much more internal and “devious”. She must exert all efforts to look normal, for a morsel of abnormality would betray her true identity and perceptibility, leading probably to disastrous consequences, as the grandmother said, being devoured by a cat. As a result of this constant practice of transforming true perceptions into publicly acceptable behaviors, Müller gradually developed the special capability of endowing seemingly ordinary and normal things with surprisingly eruptive powers. An example from her childhood cited in *Der Teufel sitzt im Spiegel* presents an enlightening elucidation: a stone between the trees and the house in the picture on the wall above her grandparents’ bedhead would in a moment of trance become a bulging cucumber about to explode and spread its venomous contents wide. (Müller, 1991, pp.11-12) Stone, in an ordinary eye, is just a stone as such; therefore, a surreal interpretation of the stone as an explosive cucumber is a case of aberration. This wry perception achieves two opposite purposes at the same time: on the one hand, it serves as a remainder of the ubiquitous danger in a totalitarian community; on the other hand, it endows the observer the power of metamorphosing the harmless ordinary things into something imperceptible to the surveillance, therefore, the thing and the observer form a kind of conspiracy, hence the exultation of a triumphant outwitting of the social code. The fear conjured by the very expulsiveness of the imagined cucumber is more a replacement of the real threats in social and ideological context, thus functioning as a catharsis. This stone-cucumber metamorphosis can also be approached from another angle: the act of obsession with a thing outside oneself and therefore alien to one’s very existence is in itself an act of transcendence. When one is oppressed in virtually all aspects related to human society, one tends to look for outlets in material things in his or her natural environment. As Müller says: “Ein Gegenstand ist ein fremder Stoff, der sich einschleicht und das Faszinosum entsteht ja auch erst durch die Fremdheit. Um so mehr ich davor fremdle, umso laenger bleibt der Kopf damit beschaeftigt, um so laenger dreht sich, was ich an diesem Gegenstand gesehen habe, im Kopf.” [An object is of alien material which creeps in, and it is through this alienness that the weird fascination establishes itself. The further away I keep myself from it, the longer the head is working with it, and the longer the things that I’ve seen in the object turn in the head.] (Müller, 1991, p.12) This obsession with alien and concrete things is a kind of internal resistance to fears looming around one’s physical and psychological existence, as objects worked upon repetitively in the head are what is steady in a world fraught with uncertainties and insecurities. The subject, when discovering the world of concrete objects, finds himself in the position of a creator in the sense of literary production. He/she is then able to generate a world, be it bizarre or not, which serves as a counter to threats from all sorts of oppressive forces.

3. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF FEAR: TWO BASIC TYPES

The above-discussed strategies against fear, the transformation of fear into weird but thought-provoking metaphors, are the core of Müller’s poetic practices.

The first type of transformation is based on “the dissolution of the boundaries between inside and outside (Marven, p.57).” In this case, fear as felt by the self is transplanted onto a comparable object suffering violence or death, with the peculiarity that the self is empathizing itself into the imagined identity of the object; therefore, the fear of the violence originally inflicted on the self is transcended and lifted off. The self is, in a state of trance, experiencing the suffering or death of the other, be it human or animal. Marven cited in her study a scene from Müller’s first book *Niederungen* in which the child narrator likens herself to a pig being slaughtered (Marven, p.63). In this scenario, the boundary between the self and the world is compromised, and in the resulting drifting and fragmentalizing of the self-identity the fear one is subject to in everyday life is being deconstructed, and the original suffering subject is rendered into an witness to a violent process and its consequences, such as “the wholly imagined scenario of intestines over the bed (Marven, p.63).” In this particular case, the violent death of the pig becomes a metaphor which is founded upon the similarity between the suffering of the subject and that of the pig. What is special about this generation of trope is its liberating and therapeutic function.

Metaphor creation in the same vein also functions in Müller’s other works, such as her highly acclaimed 2009 novel *Atemschaukel*. The title of the novel first appears in a scene after Leo returned home after 5-year nightmarish confinement in the labor camp. In sleepless nights, the things he once used in the camp such as toothbrush, combs, etc., which are embodiment of the ever present horrors of that experience, became a patched-up monster in his imagination which mercilessly pursued him. His reaction is rendered into the image of a swing which, normally moving evenly and serenely, suddenly loses its balance and begins to twist and contort. The line between the self and the world, namely the inanimate object in this case, is blurred at the moment, and the subject’s “... imagination projects the horrors onto the outside words, in a fictional form of reality (Marven, p.63).”

The second type is the surreal fictionalization of the fear one experiences. As Paola Bozzi argues, “Herta Müller, ..., regards perception as an active process, ...”, in which “to see imaginatively is to clothe something in a fiction that transforms its meaning and may take the simple form of an image.” She bases her argument on the recognition that “..., productive imagination, ..., is the guiding power of artistic genius; its ‘aesthetic ideas’ create another nature, out of the material which the real ones gives .”(Brandt, & Glajar, p.112) Take the image

Hunger Angel in Müller's *Atemschaukel* for example. The very thing of hunger itself seems simple and physical, and its psychological impact is also imaginable. That is to say, hunger actually is multilayer in meaning and signification. As an artist, Müller renders all these included meanings into one image, the Hungerengel; above that, she also confers personality to this creation: it follows one everywhere, it flies in the air, every one has his or her own hunger angel. This transformation renders what seems mundane into a metaphysical entity, which not only retains the physical features of hunger, but also transcends the physicality: it embodies the incessant torture of hunger, the individuality of hunger, the irony of hunger in the place of an guarding angel, the paradoxical nature of hunger as killer and defender against death, the traumatic effects on the human nature. Hunger, when so elevated, is also metaphysical in the sense that it gains philosophical signification. It exemplifies a philosophy of resistance, that is, when one finds himself in an extremely traumatic situation, artistic imagination may be the last strategy of survival. In the harsh world of Gulag where hunger threatens one's life every minute and one feels deserted by the whole world, the artistic and surreal transformation of hunger into a guarding angel is not only ironic, but also, and more important, soul-saving. It gives people hope, even though the hope is closely associated with death.

These two types of transformation are actually interwoven. Herta Müller once remarked: "Für mich ist Surrealitaet nicht etwas anderes als Realitaet, sondern eine tiefere Realitaet." [For me the surreal is not different from the real; sur-reality is a deeper reality.] (Haines, p.18) Whether it is the trespassing of boundaries between the subject and the object, or the fictionalizing of the real, the invention of perception is an act which, by using the imagination in extreme situations, manipulates the unbearable realities and makes fear less acute. It is an artistic mechanism which builds a defensive wall around the soul of an individual human being, even if he or she is not at all an artistic genius as Herta Müller. In this sense, Herta Müller's metaphorical transformation of fear, her invention of perception, has acquired universal value.

CONCLUSION

This paper roughly delineates the genesis of fear and its countermeasures in Herta Müller's personal formation and literary works. Fear, from its most fundamental existential sense to its apparently secular causes and expressions, is not only an individual

trauma for her, but in a sense, more a collective one for those having lived in totalitarian and ultraconservative communities and/or societies. Müller, however, unlike her likes, has developed a unique literary self-aid kit, the central piece of which is her "erfundene Wahrnehmung" [invented perception], to cope with the overwhelmingly enclosing and suffocating forces intending to neutralize her ways of cognizing the world around her. In these resisting struggles, both secretly and openly, Müller's otherworldly poetic conceptions accrued to something of unprecedented nature and strength. Her uncanny combination of images in forming surreal metaphors, her loosely woven and seemingly illogical narration, her obsession with collage of words in her poems, her oblique revelation of the crookedness of human mentalities, to name only a few of her poetic characteristics, have secured her a very special position in world literature and established an obelisk for the sufferings and resistances of the humiliated and the insulted.

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