

Embodying the Memory of the Silenced Dead in Herta Müller's *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel*

Encarnando la memoria de los muertos silenciados
en *Herztier* y *Atemschaukel* de Herta Müller

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Abstract: This article focuses on the representation of the silenced dead in Herta Müller's *Herztier* and *Atemschaukel*. The starting point is the hypothesis that the figure of the dead serves Müller to claim the importance, according to Thomas W. Laqueur's assumptions, of "the work of the dead", for the collective memory of the German-Romanian community of Banat and Romania as a whole. In both novels three key elements of the representation of the memory of the dead in dictatorial and post-dictatorial Romania are analyzed: the precise way of dying, the corporeality of the dead and their relationship with objects, and, finally, the ghostly presence of the dead among the living either through objects or in the form of a dream. The presence of the dead amongst the living in Müller's universe is not comforting, but difficult, ghostly, and disturbing.

Keywords: Herta Müller; *Herztier*; *Atemschaukel*; dead; memory; body.

Resumen: El artículo se centra en el análisis de la representación de los muertos silenciados en *Herztier* y *Atemschaukel* de Herta Müller. Se parte de la hipótesis de que la figura de los muertos sirve a Müller para reclamar la relevancia, siguiendo los presupuestos de Thomas W. Laqueur, de "la obra de los muertos" para el desarrollo de la memoria colectiva de la comunidad germano-rumana del Banat y de Rumanía en su totalidad. Se analiza en ambas novelas tres elementos claves de la representación de la memoria de los muertos silenciados en la Rumanía dictatorial y post-dictatorial: la forma de morir, la corporeidad de los muertos y su relación con los objetos, y, por último, la presencia fantasmagórica del muerto entre los vivos, bien a través de objetos bien como sueño. La labor de los muertos en Müller no es, pues, reconfortante, sino dificultosa, fantasmagórica y perturbadora.

Palabras clave: Herta Müller; *Herztier*; *Atemschaukel*; muerto; memoria; cuerpo.

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1. Introduction

Herta Müller is a world-renowned and laureate author for creating landscapes of dispossession and silence as survival in dictatorships. My paper analyzes Herta Müller's representation of the dead without voice in her narrative work. I will start from the hypothesis that such representation, especially of the silenced dead in her fiction, serves to underscore the importance of their contribution to the development of collective memory in Romania and of all those societies marked by dictatorships through history. This claim emphasizes the need to acknowledge the silenced dead in order to progress in time, that is, to humanize history. Specifically, the paper will focus on *Herztier* (1994, *The Land of Green Plums*) and *Atemschaukel* (2009, *The Hunger Angel*).

Several studies have examined the leitmotiv of death in Herta Müller's work, but critical perspectives on the representation of the dead are scarce. *Herta Müller: Handbuch* (2017) stands out among the most recent general books on the figure and work of Herta Müller. In this volume Martin Kagel dedicates a specific chapter to the topic of death (2017: 202-245). Norbert Otto Eke, meanwhile, describes the author's work as thanatography, a description of the process of dying (1991: 78). He also refers to *The Land of Green Plums* and to some extent to *The Hunger Angel* too, as books of "Totengedenken" ("commemoration", Eke, 2013: 106).

In his *Herta Müller-Handbuch* chapter, Kagel describes the constant triangle formed by the threat of, fear of, and attraction to death in her narrative (2017: 224). The constant presence of death is, he contends, prominent both in Herta Müller's own biography and in her literary representation of childhood. He highlights her fascination with the physical enigma of death, as well as the atavistic fear it produces in the recurrent protagonist of a girl, especially in *Nadirs*, which captures an animist experience of nature. The elements of nature are presented to the child as friendly beings, which also become mortal threats, so that the fear of mortal nature is also continuously present. In fact, death is represented as a natural phase of life, in which the dead, once literally engulfed by the earth, continue to live by feeding the plants (Kagel, 2017: 221, Müller, 2014: min. 4:30-5:10).

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Alongside natural death, Müller's narrative also explores violent deaths in the National Socialist past and in the World Wars, and unnatural deaths. In both cases, Müller offers an explicit literary representation of the daily and historical brutality of her native German-Romanian community, Banat. Here, in this rural enclave of Romania, death plays a regulating role in multiple ways in daily social life: through the collective slaughter of animals, burials, funerals, and wakes, all of which vertebrate the rhythm of relations among the inhabitants of the village, including the children. Through all these mechanisms death coheres the social and cultural community (Kagel, 2017: 221-222).

The fear of death is intertwined with its constant threat in the case of the adult protagonists, as in *The Land of Green Plums*. This is an omnipresent threat, as the protagonists-narrators face surveillance and persecution by the Romanian secret service agency, the SECURITATE, which identifies them as dissidents, and therefore as threats to the system.

As critics have noted, death is elaborated through the special case of a camp prisoner in *The Hunger Angel*. This novel depicts a labor camp, in which the seventeen-year-old protagonist Leo Auberg is confined early in 1945. Here, a combination of miserable conditions—freezing temperatures, hunger, an extremely unhealthy environment, and overcrowding—and the constant surveillance system conspire to bring prisoners constantly face to face with death. In this case, moreover, death is presented as a reality from which the survivor needs to move away emotionally in order to survive. And death needs to be seen as an occasion for profit in the form of a collection of objects left behind by the dead. Indeed, for Brigid Haines, death stands as a form of gradual and mechanical dehumanization throughout the novel (2013: 128).

In the following, I will explore the dead in Müller's fiction and argue that the dead become a continuum in her oeuvre with a strong bodily, cultural, and social dimension. It is the aim of this paper to focus on *The Land of Green Plums* (LGP) and *The Hunger Angel* (HA), in order to demonstrate the literary strategies that the author employs to present the function of the silenced dead and their contribution to the complex Romanian collective memory.

2. (Silenced) dead bodies matter: A theoretical approach

Thomas W. Laqueur's argument in his anthropological study on the relationship between Western culture and its dead in *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (2015) offers a basis for the theoretical approach taken here. At the core of Laqueur's study is the body of the dead, in the sense that:

Bodies matter, they are always much more than they seem. [...] the dead, as represented by their bodies, are somewhere and are something. And [...] there is a tradition of thinking that goes from classical antiquity to contemporary anthropology that argues for the significance of the work of the dead to the making of civilizations and of communities of all sorts (Laqueur, 2015: 31).

A dead person might stay in memory "with her body as its locus" (Laqueur, 2015: 31) for years, decades, or even longer, and can still lay claim on the space and attention of the living. One example of this would be pilgrimages to the graves of prominent members of a community. The dead bodies create a community of memory by several means and thus take on a cultural dimension: they announce their presence and meaning in society by occupying space, by addressing subsequent generations, and by creating continuities between the past and the present, even between the disparate parts of a fractured history (Laqueur, 2015: 22).

Laqueur agrees with Robert Hertz, a disciple of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, in insisting on the dual dimension of the dead: their bodily dimension and their cultural dimension, which turns the deceased into social beings, into "creatures who need to be eased out of this world and settled safely into the next and into memory" (Laqueur, 2015: 10). In this way, one can overcome Diogenes' purely physical conception of the dead as mere bodies in putrefaction in order to accept a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead: while the living take charge of caring for the dead in their transition to the hereafter and to the realm of the memory of the living, the dead assist the living in the continuation of their lives, existences, and cultures, by inviting us to recognize that what has befallen others will befall us (Laqueur, 2015: 21).

Müller's approach to death and the dead in her fiction (and nonfiction writings and interviews) matches Laqueur's theory: as human beings we are determined by our desire to live with our ancestors and their bodies (Laqueur, 2015: 43), and, in line with Hans-Joseph Gadamer and his *Reason in the Age of Science* (1981), we live with our dead both in their bodily dimension and in their posthumous presence in our memory (Laqueur, 2015: 92). Following Hertz's sociological perspective, a society integrates the deceased into its community by conferring on them a new status and space as "ancestors" who contributed to the present and who serve as reminders of social and cultural values. These ancestors also crystalize their presence among the living according to Laqueur by means of their (present or absent) bodies, located in places conferred by society, and by means of the names kept in the memory of the living.

Likewise, in Müller's work the dead are elaborated both in their corporal and cultural dimension, that is to say as social beings (Laqueur, 2015: 10), and are constructed as a fundamental component of cultural memory, in this case of Romania. Especially significant in Müller's work is her emphasis on the determinant work of the silenced dead in the cultural memory of Romania in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Müller's recognition of the silenced dead as victims of violence, historical injustices, and power during different periods of the twentieth century and the undeniable strength of these dead in Romanian family and cultural memories are palpable throughout her entire personal, literary, and aesthetic discourse (see Müller's interviews with Moritz, 2015; with Barfoed, 2014; with Steiner, 2011; Müller, 2009, 2010).

3. Memory of the silenced dead in *The Land of Green Plums* and *The Hunger Angel*

Müller deals with the memory and silencing of the non-heroic dead of wars and dictatorships, such as the First and Second World Wars, the Shoah, the Gulag, and the Ceaușescu dictatorship, in three ways. Firstly, she makes a special point in discussing the dead whose bodies do not lie in spaces of common recognition and whose names are not pronounced in public. Secondly, she casts a critical eye on the difference between the place denied to the memory of civilian victims and that granted to the memory of the perpetrators of violence in the official

discourse, as well as the stratification of collective memory or memories. And thirdly, she uses metaphors and synecdoches in the poetics of objects to refer to the silenced dead.

LGP offers an insight into both village and city life in 1970s Romania, as the narrator and protagonists are students who emigrated from Romanian-German villages to the city of Timisora. She therefore addresses the function of the silenced dead not only in the collective memory of the German-Romanian village community, but also in the wider context of the Romanian dictatorship. Both spaces are actually portrayed as similar products of the same oppressive and violent system of dictatorial control and fear. The function of the silenced dead becomes a cohesive force for communities of resistance, such as the group made up of the first-person narrator and her three friends Edgar, Kurt, and Georg, who are investigating the enigma of Lola's death. By the end of the novel, Kurt and Georg also belong to the realm of the silenced dead. Moreover, the survivors Edgar and the narrator-protagonist have finished collecting fragments of Lola's biography and testimonies from her diary. In conclusion, the memory of the silenced dead, namely Lola, Kurt, and Georg, is preserved in the small community of resistance that has formed around the narrator. This means a collective gathering of historical data on violence and abuses of the system and the construction, thanks to those very memories, of necessary critical tools to resist the dictatorship.

HA, based on Oskar Pastior's biographical experience of deportation, looks at the function of the dead in the heterotopic space of the labor camp and the lives of surviving prisoners after their return home. The novel makes a direct reference to an episode in history that had, until recently, remained silenced: namely, the deportation on Stalin's orders of German-Romanians between the ages of 17 and 45 at the end of the Second World War to Soviet labor camps in order to "reconstruct" the Soviet Union damaged by Germany during the War. In this novel the anthropological function of the deceased prisoners consists of helping the living prisoners to generate their own collective memory and giving voice to their own narrative, which has been silenced not only in the Romanian official collective memory of the time but also in the historiography.

Having summarized, then, the plots of *LGP* and *HA*, and following Laqueur's postulate, I propose to conceive of the dead in Herta Müller's

narrative as social beings (Laqueur, 2015: 10). Furthermore, the examples offered by the author approximate Laqueur's assertion that "the history of the work of the dead is a history of how they dwell in us, individually and communally" (Laqueur, 2015: 17).

In Müller's concrete, sober, precise style, closely linked nevertheless to images that cause more uncertainty than clarity (Læg Reid, 2013: 61; Rüter, 2013: 195), both selected works present the silenced dead in different ways: first, in the specific way they die; second, in their corporeality and their relationship with objects; and third, in their ghostly presence among the living through objects or in the form of a dream. In the interaction of these three factors we see the configuration of a stratified memory of the socially accepted and the silenced dead during different violent periods in twentieth-century history.

3.1 *Graves versus ways of dying as topoi of memory*

The centrality of the contrast between the socially respected dead and the silenced dead is clear, especially in *LGP* and *HA*. In *HA* graves, as public spaces of commemoration and social recognition, only appear in Leo Auberg's occasional dreams about his mother visiting his grave (*HA*, 2013: 9)¹. The dead in the labor camp are not conferred any such space, so the collective memory of the prisoners about their dead in the camp is based on the image of the way they died (Deaf Mitzi crushed by two coal cars, Kati Meyer buried alive in the cement tower, Irma Pfeifer drowned in the mortar, *HA*, 2013: 80), as well as on the topoi of handling their bodies and objects, as will be discussed in the following section. The dead in the camp are not only denied a place of human recognition to rest (they are stacked up, covered with snow, chopped up, and buried in a hole, *HA*, 2013: 140) but the authorities also spread lies about their deaths. Thus, Leo Auberg's narrative represents the contested memory of the silenced dead.

In *LGP* the narrator-protagonist begins her story with the statement: "To this day, I can't really picture a grave. Only a belt, a window, a nut, and a rope" (*LGP*, 1999: 1)². She formulates the relationship of her

¹ The reference to quotes from *The Hunger Angel* will be indicated with *HA*, 2013 followed by the page number.

² The reference to quotes from *The Land of Green Plums* will be indicated with *LGP* 1999 followed by the page number.

memory to the dead by disassociating them from the image of the grave and associating them with objects related to the way that some of those around her died. The grave serves as an example of a public artifact that serves as an acknowledgement of the social place granted by the living to each of the dead during the time of the Ceaușescu regime. In fact, in the novel we attend the wake of the grandfather, a soldier in the First World War, and the burial of the father of the narrator, a former soldier in the Waffen SS during the Second World War. The image of a third deceased member of the family, the maternal grandmother, on the other hand, is not associated with the social ritual of a wake or a funeral as a form of public recognition. Instead, it is linked to a scene depicted in the intimate care of the corpse within the private domestic environment (*LGP*, 1999: 233-234). The narrator's story focuses on cleanliness and the action of dressing the female corpse as an aid to the transit of the soul.

In contrast to these three family members who pass away as a result of natural deaths, the central view in *LGP* pays more attention to less natural and less transparent deaths, to the silenced dead who have neither a right to a wake, nor a funeral, nor a space in collective memory. This is the case with figures who oppose the rules of the Romanian authoritarian system during the 1970s, such as: Lola, one of the narrator's roommates, who dies in suspicious circumstances after an alleged suicide; Georg, who dies after also suspiciously falling out of the window following his exile to Frankfurt; and Kurt, who commits suicide. In fact, as a corpse, Lola is barely described³; she only appears as "an empty patch of floor" (*LGP*, 1999: 22), meaning the projected shadow of her naked body hanging in the closet with a belt. Furthermore, there are more recurrent allusions to failed escapes, about which silence is maintained (*LGP*, 1999: 61, 105, 132), and suicides without death notices (*LGP*, 1999: 101, 161-162, 224). The narrator's statement at the beginning of her narration, then, is evidence of her awareness of the work of the silenced dead in her own memory both as an individual and as a member of the Romanian-German minority specifically and Romanian society as a whole.

³ This contrasts with the detailed observation of her body in life, with references of the narrator to the scabby rope down Lola's back, the scabby circle over her buttocks, belly, cheekbones, mouth, eyes, elbows, knees, legs, behind, face, feet, shoulders, and hips (*LGP*, 1999: 15-18).

From the beginning of the story the protagonist-narrator acknowledges her inability to picture graves and instead visualizes the dead in relation to the physical needs that cease after death (to shave, to cut one's nails), as well as in relation to the words that remain in one's mouth, without being pronounced ("sack of words", *LGP*, 1999: 1). Both physical needs and unpronounced words also function as leitmotifs in the closing passage of the novel referring to both the survivors and the dead of totalitarianism. The narrator aligns with the survivors through a very physical definition based on regular bodily care: "We [the narrator, Kurt, the living] still say: My barber and my nail-clippers, while there are others [Lola, Edgar, Georg, the dead] who won't ever lose another button" (*LGP*, 1999: 242). While the juxtaposition of an ongoing and a terminated need for bodily care marks a clear difference between the survivors and the perished, words remaining unpronounced in mouths represent a continuum between the living and the dead under a totalitarian system. With the same sentence both starting and closing the novel ("When we [the living] don't speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable, and when we do, we make fools of ourselves" (*LGP*, 1999: 1, 242)), there seems to be no safe option but unpronounced words, which leads to self-damaging silences.

In the narrator's memory, the silenced dead are thus present, both as a body and as silent testimony to the suffering and perishing of individuals in Ceaușescu's totalitarian system. This testimony does not make up a complete and coherent image, but rather an enigma formed out of partial, fragmented images. In the same way, the words that the late Lola has left written in her diary will be in the hands of the narrator only for a few days, until the notebook disappears after a SECURITATE search, so that the narrator has only temporary access to Lola's testimony and biographical data. After the disappearance of the diary, the narrator carries out a task of reconstructing what she already read and the rest will be configured among the four friends (Kurt, Georg, Edgar, and the protagonist-narrator herself) with partial information and conjectures. Kurt and Georg die in the process, and the narrator and Edgar go into exile in Germany. They try to put together a great number of pictures of daily life violence, abuse, and inhuman behavior as coherent evidence of the continuous brutality of Ceaușescu's regime. Thus, the narrative emphasizes the idea of the fragility, fragmentariness, and the choral and collective configuration of the memory of the dead.

Beverly Driver Eddy and Judith Lewis Herman associate the fragmentary character of the image of the dead with a typical characteristic of trauma literature. Eddy refers to the allusions to a belt, a window, a walnut, and a rope in *LGP* as “transfinite images” (Eddy, 2000: 67), that is, as objects that become images of trauma, like the concretion of an enigma impossible to decipher or understand. And it is, indeed, Judith Lewis Herman who insists on the relevance of incorporating frozen and fragmentary sensations and images into the survivor’s narrative (Herman, 1992: 177) in the treatment of trauma victims.

Apart from this connection between fragmentariness and trauma, which is revealed in the narrator’s comments like “I can’t really picture a grave. Only a belt, a window, a nut, and a rope” (*LGP*, 1999: 1), the corporal dimension and the exact form in which the body abandons life are also intertwined in its memory. The belt, the window, and the rope thus become metaphors of death, as well as a “sack”, because it is a recurrent mode of suicide to sink into the river with sacks full of stones (*LGP*, 1999: 102-103).

Therefore, the association between the dead person and his/her particular and unnatural way of dying confers on the silenced and displaced dead a space and name in collective memory.

3.2 *Body and objects of the dead*

Alongside the depiction of the way of dying, it is the image of the corpse and its objects that also remains in the collective memory, centered on two aspects in Herta Müller’s narrative: on the one hand, in line with the Catholic paradigm of the German-Romanian community, the corpse is conceived as a possession to be cared for and accompanied in the transit of the soul, since in turn it will guide the living from the otherworld (Laqueur, 2015: 10); and on the other, the corpse is also conceived as a source of possessions, his/her personal objects, which as a corpse he/she will no longer need and will thus serve to aid the subsistence of his/her fellow human beings in this world.

As for the care and accompaniment of the corpse by the living, in *LGP* we find references not only to the ritual caring of the bodies, but also to their belongings. While the father is handled in a funeral parlor in town, therefore without any direct physical contact on the part of the family and with all his personal belongings in his coffin, there is a

remarkable detailed reference to the intimate care and accompaniment of the grandmother's corpse:

Mother fetched a bowl of water and a white cloth. Toni the clockmaker said: Laying out a corpse isn't something kin should do. A stranger has to do it, otherwise everybody will die. He washed Grandmother's face neck, hands, and feet. [...] He cut open a pair of the new underwear with the scissors. Mother sewed them back together on the dead woman. [...] It'll hold till she gets to Heaven [said Mother].

Cleanliness is next to godliness, I thought, she won't go to Heaven dirty. [...]

Rest your heart-beast, I said to her [grandmother] (*LGP*, 1999: 233-234).

The description of this scene offers several key concepts in the cultural imaginary of Müller's native Banat related to the dead: the menace of touching a beloved's corpse when preparing for the afterlife, physical cleanliness as the first step to godliness, and the active role of the living in procuring a peaceful eternal rest. The idea of the living helping the dead to rest and depart recurs in *LGP* through images like the grandmother covering her son's coffin with a white quilt as a symbolic gesture of protection (*LGP*, 1999: 66) and the protagonist trying to sleep in order to help Georg's soul find peace (*LGP*, 1999: 225).⁴ The dead in turn look after "the forest" (*LGP*, 1999: 226) as a metaphor of the afterlife.⁵ In addition, and thanks to their new special abilities and knowledge of their new state of death (*LGP*, 1999: 1), they guide the living. Mourning thus foresees a reciprocal relationship, as Laqueur explains.

HA offers a special case for the study of the relationship between the living and the dead in Müller's narrative. Brigid Haines contends that

⁴ There are further examples of these same themes in *Nadirs*, with descriptions of the wake and funeral of the narrator's father (1999: 1-3), of a dream about the grandfather's wake in a metaphorical forest of geraniums (1999: 65), and the decomposition of corpses.

⁵ *Nadirs* also illustrates the opposition between village and city in the treatment of the dead by highlighting the physical-ritual nature of people's relationship with the corpse in the village as opposed to a more dehumanized and pragmatic approach in the town (*Nadirs*, 1999: 19).

throughout the novel death stands as a form of gradual and mechanical dehumanization (2013: 128). However, it is precisely in this heterotopic⁶ space of the labor camp that it becomes palpable that victims, even in the most dehumanizing situations, need to overcome brutality and maintain the ritual of caring for corpses. In this novel, the tension between the instinct of material survival and the instinct of transcendental survival in the confrontation with corpses is expressed in a particularly clear way. In the story of the protagonist and narrator Leo Auberg we see his need to ignore the immediacy of death (*HA*, 2013: 79), but his narrative also confronts us with scenes both of caring for the dead and of corpses being stripped of their belongings, which has practically become a funerary ritual⁷:

I realized many were missing. But unless they'd collapsed right in front of me I didn't consider them dead. [...] This [overpowering fear similar to indifference] is what allows you to act so fast when you're the first to discover a dead person. You have to undress him quickly, before the body gets too stiff to bend, and before someone else makes off with his clothes. You have to take his saved bread out of his pillowcase before someone else beats you to it. Clearing away the dead person's things is our way of mourning. When the stretcher arrives in the barrack, there should be nothing to haul away but a body.

[...]The camp is a practical place (*HA*, 2013: 138-139).

In this situation, in the prisoner community of the camp, psychological survival goes hand in hand with physical survival, which leads this community to create its own heterotopic code. Mourning takes on a ritual form reflecting the heterotopic space of the forced labor camp, as a realm marked by famine, need, misery, dirt, and cold: the collection ("Clearing away the dead person's things" *HA*, 2013: 138), that is, stripping the dead of the objects they carried in that "non-life" of the labor camp and that they will no longer need, becomes a particular kind of

⁶ For an analysis of the space of the labor camp in *HA* as heterotopia, see Iztueta (2013).

⁷ Contrary to this, the use of corpses and their personal objects as a gain by camp commanders does not have any token of mourning, but is instead shown as an immoral plundering in contrast to the "collecting" performed by prisoners who live under miserable conditions (*HA*, 2013: 197-198).

mourning. The brutal pragmatism of misery and the foundational ritual of civilization thus merge in the figures of the victims.

Human dignity, a certain degree of civilization, and, therefore of resistance to brutality is, in Müller's narrative universe, defined by the relationship established with the bodies of the dead: even in the most urgent situations Müller's characters seek a mourning ritual based on care, as a prelude to the aid they expect from the dead.

3.3 *Ghostly memories*

Objects hold a prime position in Müller's perception and aesthetics, as she herself observes in "In jeder Sprache sitzen andere Augen":

Immer waren mir die Gegenstände wichtig. [...] wenn sie länger als ihre Besitzer leben, wandert die ganze abwesende Person in diese dagebliebenen Gegenstände (2010: 15-16).

Consequently, the objects of the dead acquire a dual dimension in Müller's work: there is a pragmatic dimension, exemplified to the extreme in *HA* in that special ritual of "recollection" at the moment a prisoner falls dead; and there is a symbolic and even "ghostly" dimension, in the role they play in transmitting the participation of the dead in the world of the living after their physical death.

The objects depicted by Müller also reveal Laqueur's "work of the dead". In fact, besides the bodily and the cultural dimensions (bodies "that have remained part of the cultural world and have not entirely returned to nature" 2015: 62), Laqueur highlights in the dead a third category: he specifically refers to dead people that exist "among the living as strange doppelgangers, dead but not quite dead" (*ibid.*). Many of the objects related to the dead in Müller's narrative perform this function of connecting two worlds, especially in the case of the deceased victims of violence, oppression, and persecution.

In *LGP*, Lola's objects maintain a strong presence in the lives of Edgar, Georg, Kurt, and the narrator even after her death, thus casting a shadow over them. Indeed, the friends try to reconstruct their memory of Lola through these objects: the refrigerator in which Lola kept animal viscera becomes a particularly significant image for Kurt, an engineer destined to supervise improvement work in a slaughterhouse.

The viscera, and therefore the fridge that contains them, serve as images of brutality, the visceral and cruel physical death associated with the dictatorship described in the novel. The fridge, then, becomes for Kurt a guide to his decisions after Lola's death. After several months spent in the slaughterhouse, Kurt claims to feel like Lola's fridge, a sign of his feelings of guilt for contributing to this space of human brutality. While animals are sacrificed in the slaughterhouse, the workers drink their blood, steal organ meats and brains, as well as joints of beef and pork and cows' tails (*LGP*, 1999: 103). Therefore, all are accomplices in the brutality of slaughter. Kurt also alludes to the slaughterhouse as a space for the forced labor of prisoners, another facet of the brutality of the system. Finally, after having expressed his feelings of guilt and hopelessness as an accomplice in the country's brutality, Kurt will end up committing suicide by hanging himself, just like Lola.

Significantly, both the viscera preserved by Lola and the belt with which she allegedly commits suicide become two objects that also transmit Lola's presence after her death to the female protagonist-narrator. This transposition of Lola to the objects takes shape in the form of the narrator's impulsive reactions to these objects. After Lola's death, the narrator claims to be dominated by the impulse to go to shop windows with aluminum bowls full of tongue, liver, and kidney (*LGP*, 1999: 33), in the same way she relates to seeing and smelling the viscera in the fridge, even though they are no longer there (*LGP*: 62). Lola's ghostly presence is therefore linked to the narrator's impulse of attraction toward the brutal, the visceral, toward death in its crudest physical dimension. On the contrary, the recurring allusions to the narrator's belt used by Lola to commit suicide (*LGP*: 22, 42, 225) are associated with Lola haunting the narrator and with the latter's flight impulse: she claims to have avoided wearing belts for two years after Lola's death.

The ghostly presence of the dead among the living, as well as through their objects, is also tangible in Müller's employment of dreams as a motif. These become an artifact conveying to the living the message that past, present and future are interconnected by the dead. In *LGP* Georg's appearance in Edgar's recurring dream connects the present with the future:

Edgar had a recurring dream: Kurt and I [Edgar] were lying in a match-box. Georg was standing at the foot of the box, saying: [...] You sleep, I'll look after the forest. Then it will be your turn (*LGP*, 1999: 226).

In the dream Georg embodies the figure of the guardian and caretaker who shows the way to the future and is also a premonitory of Kurt's imminent suicide.⁸

If we agree with Nicholas Abraham's assertion that the ghostly elements and beings that haunt us are not the dead themselves, "but the gap left in us by the secrets of others" (Abraham, 1994: 171), the objects that survive the dead and their oneiric appearance in Müller's work may also serve as an aesthetic manifestation of the impossibility to apprehend the meaninglessness of an authoritarian system and the silence imposed among others on mortal victims.

Conclusion

Herta Müller's narrative universe shows through the representation of the dead the different strata making up German-Romanian collective memory. According to Laqueur, the dead as social beings announce their presence and meaning in society by occupying space, by addressing subsequent generations, and by creating continuities between past and present (Laqueur, 2015: 22). The question thus emerges of how the dead can address subsequent generations and occupy a space as social beings, when there is a system silencing their memory and banning their space in the public sphere. Müller's contribution is her literary representation of the work of these silenced dead in collective memory, and of their role in developing the collective memory of Romania.

With the strong presence of the body and its fragmentariness in Müller's configuration of the memory of the dead, she challenges the living to confront a mirror reflection of the tabooed image of their silenced dead. In the selected works the deceased are remembered through the image of their unnatural way of dying, through their bodies and objects, and through ghostly presence. Violent death is thus remem-

⁸ There are further examples in "The Funeral Sermon" in *Nadirs*. In this case a dream connects the past with the narrator's present because the idea that the ongoing values of the German-Romanian community of Banat are still deeply anchored in the National Socialist past is mentioned through the artifact of the dream.

bered in images of objects, disturbing physical acts, and ghostly presences; and it is through that very aesthetics that the dead survive in the collective memory. The work of the dead with the living is, therefore, not comforting, but difficult, ghostly, and disturbing. Confronting the Romanian readership with such a disturbing insight into this stratified memory becomes, in turn, a necessary step toward developing Romanian collective memory.

Analyzing the relationship between the living and the bodies of the dead in Müller's narrative shows that her protagonists seek a kind of mourning which is based on care, as a prelude to the permanent reciprocal human and cultural relationship between the living and the dead. The dead embody strong connections between past, present, and future. In *HA* the work of the dead is presented as creating existential meaning after the trauma of deportation to a labor camp. Only after having acknowledged what has been silenced can Romanian society progress. *LGP* also exemplifies the need to be confronted with the constant and often ghostly presence of the silenced dead among the living in order to be able to comprehend Romanian history.

As a continuation of the current analysis of the dead with a special focus on the body, it would be beneficial to examine further works by Müller, such as *Nadirs* and *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger*, as well as her poetry and collage poems.

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