Heinemüller's Conception of Political Ideas in The Hamlet Machine - Inheritance and Comparison with Brecht

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ABSTRACT

Heinemüller's original intention in creating The Hamlet Machine was to use Hamlet as a vehicle for political allusion to the socialist world of the late Cold War. He tried to create a variant of the Hamlet theme in a Communist country after Stalin's death…Combined with the creator's own political leanings, it is clear that the seemingly chaotic plot logic of the work is wrapped up in the political metaphorical imagery of the violence and darkness characteristic of a brutal play, which is a reflection of both the external pioneering nature of the work and its internal political nature. In addition, the frequent traces of interstitial effects in the staging of this work, combined with some echoes of Heiner Müller's view of Brecht's political theatre, thus confirm Heiner Müller's critical inheritance of Brecht's plays.

KEYWORDS

Hamlet; Heiner Müller; Cold War; East Germany; Socialism; Avant-garde Theatre.

1. INTRODUCTION

If one were to simply divide the text according to conventional ideas, Heiner Müller's Hamletmachine would be classified as a highly postmodern, avant-garde play. The play is reduced from a long draft to a final eight pages, which Heiner Müller himself defines as a reduced version of Hamlet's tragedy.[2] The play is divided into five acts, but instead of following a linear narrative in the usual sense, the five acts are constructed in a non-linear, illogical, disconnected pattern. The work is a rebellion and reinvention of Shakespeare's version of Hamlet; the names of the characters in the original play are followed, but the content of the work itself is far removed from the logic of the original. The diminished logic of the plot and the blurred timeline in The Hamletmachine present an extremely post-modern consciousness in general. From the point of view of textual imagery, it seems that the politics and zeitgeist of these postmodern forms are worth exploring.

2. "ENORMOUS ROOM"

The Hamletmachine was produced in 1977 in the post-Cold War era, and its creator, Heiner Müller, was located in the GDR, the dividing line between the Cold War fronts, and was a socialist, which leads to the initial assumption that the political subject of the work is European socialism in the context of the Cold War. As a postmodern play with a highly fragmented text, this work relies heavily on dense imagery for its representation of the concept of reality, and Heiner Müller argues that, in addition to visual projection against overly one-dimensional and flat conceptual representations, metaphorical images have an ironic quality that brings the work of art closer to its highest task:

mobilising the imagination.[3] For this subtle metaphorical relationship that exists between images and politics, Heiner Müller argues that there is a subconscious acuity in the viewer's mind[4].

The embodiment of the concept of Europe is noted at the beginning of the second scene of the work, "The Europe of Woman": "Enormous room. Ophelia. Her heart is a clock."[5] The Enormous room, where this scene takes place, is the same name as the novel The Enormous Room, written in 1922 by the American poet Edward Estlin Cummings. The novel is based on E.E. Cummings' experiences the internment in France during the First World War and is intended to represent the brutality and absurdity of war. In this novel, the enormous room refers to Europe, and the use of the enormous room as a major setting shows the reference to Europe in The Hamletmachine.

The reference to socialism and the Soviet regime is reflected in the first scene, "Family Scrapbook": "Here comes the ghost who made me, the ax still in his skull."[6]"Ghost" is synonymous with "spectre", the classic imagery of communism, from Marx's The Communist Manifesto: "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies."[7]As the imagery of the axe symbolises the overthrow of a dictator, this ghost, with 'the ax still in his skull', refers to Stalin, or rather Stalinism - which is a ghost that runs rampant in Europe and also carries the nature of a dictatorship. The metaphor for the Soviet regime is reflected in 'Clown number two in the spring of Communism'[8].Heiner Müller's subject is the socialist world after Stalin's death (as evidenced by the presence of Stalin's obituary in Russian in the theatre), Since Stalinism itself deviated from the socialist vision of Lenin's time, socialism from Stalin's time onwards took the path towards dictatorship and hegemony. Under Stalin's unilateral power, the Warsaw Pact camp experienced an 'ice age' - a period of rigid and unassailable rule. Stalin's death was a turning point for the socialist camp under the Soviet Union, marking the end of the 'ice age' and the loosening of totalitarian rule, dominated by the cult of the individual, but the deviations from idealised socialism remained uncorrected, and this was the reason for the demise of socialist rule in Eastern Europe. Thus the subsequent Soviet rulers, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, were the "Clown" of socialist regimes, taking Stalin's death as the point of division in time. The metaphor of "Clown number two" refers to Brezhnev, the second leader after Stalin's death. The "the spring of Communism" alludes to the historical event of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968: the Prague Spring, a typical example of the hegemonic nature of late Soviet revisionism, which is still used in the dramatic text "This darkly humorous treatment is a reversion to the Soviet revisionist posture of the period, in which the external slogan was Communism, but in essence it was a betrayal of Marxism-Leninism and a move towards imperialist hegemony.Prague Spring took place during Brezhnev's reign, which corresponds to the 'Clown number two' in the text, and is therefore a secondary proof of the meaning of the text.

Although not specifically named in the text, the 'Clown number one' is not absent, appearing in the fourth scene in an obscure state of temporal reversal and discontinuity. In the narrative of the fourth scene, 'Pest in Buda/Battle for Greenland': 'Space2, as destroyed by Ophelia. an empty armor, an ax stuck in an empty armor, an ax stuck in the Hamlet."[9] clarifies that the dramatic scene in Scene 4, like Scene 2, also takes place in the 'enormous room', i.e. the European continent. Similarly to the Prague Spring event in the second scene, the fourth scene also refers to another suppressed political revolution in Europe: the Hungarian Event in October 1956. The "October" in the line "The stove is smoking in quarrelsome October"[10] is an allusion to the Hungarian Event. "After an appropriate period, the uprising follows the toppling of the monument."[11] is an allusion to the destruction of the Stalin statue in Hungarian Event. It is therefore an aside to the metaphorical reference to this historical event in the fourth scene: "The monument is toppled into the dust, razed by those who succeeded in power three years after the state funeral of the hated and most honoured leader."[12]In this line, the hated and most honored leader is Stalin, and the fall of the monument into the dust symbolizes the collapse of faith in the communist leader of the people in the Soviet sphere of influence during this historical event. But this part of Stalin exists only as a symbol of the Soviet

communist regime, since "the state funeral" refers to Stalin's death in 1953, and the actual narrative of the Hungarian Event took place exactly three years later, when the who succeeded in power" refers to Khrushchev, who, after taking power, rebelled against the political landscape left behind by Stalin and carried out a major purge. The Hungarian Event was the first direct manifestation of the shift in the Soviet Union's internal diplomatic posture towards the Eastern European satellites, as a result of the change in Khrushchev's political philosophy and the rise of chauvinism in the Soviet regime during this period compared to the Stalinist period. The unnamed 'Clown number one' is therefore known to be the code name of another oppressor, Khrushchev.

From the information given in the text above, it can be seen that the play Hamletmachine, although obscure in its imagery and disorderly in its timeline, does not weaken its political content, but rather leaves room for the deconstruction of the dense metaphorical imagery contained therein. In addition, this plotless and illogical textual style defines the postmodern nature of the work in terms of visual perception, and the seemingly fragmented but meaningful imagery actually serves a common historical event, so that different scenes in the play form abstract collages that refer to different events. These collages are parallel and realistic, and their common context is the changing nature of the Soviet communist regime after the death of Stalin, and the ecology of communist beliefs in Europe under its influence.

3. HAMLET OF GERMANY

As a German-language theatre production, The Hamletmachine, while overturning the original setting of the original Shakespearean version of Hamlet in terms of plot, retains the characterisation of the original play, maintaining a homage to the original play as it is reworked. In fact, in terms of the relationship between the Germans and the character of Hamlet, the German nation's identification with Hamlet's culture dates back to Goethe's time, whose publication of his work The Sorrows of Young Werther in 1774 is seen as key to the integration of the original Hamlet into Germany. Goethe's view of Hamlet was that for Germany the figure of Hamlet itself had a distinctly contemporary pathology, a contemporary pathology characterised by a lack of concrete action while maintaining high moral standards, and that the key factor leading to this inaction was a dilemma of the will resulting from an imbalance in the capacity for contemplation, i.e. being held in a personal world of thought by this spiritual idealisation. The group corresponding to this ailment of the times as suggested by Goethe was the nineteenth-century German bourgeois intelligentsia, the Bildungsbürgertum, whose ideology was oppressed by the political space under the current situation due to the long-standing domination of the authoritarian class, thus also leading to the right-leaning attributes of this group.[13] In this way, this ideological quality of indecision due to political control seems to Goethe to have a potential fit with Shakespeare's version of Hamlet's character, but there were also some different contemporaneous views on this argument of Goethe. Schiller commented in 1797 that the German Empire and the German nation were two concepts in different dimensions, and that there were fundamental differences between them.In particular, with regard to the political nature of Germany's intrinsic fit with Hamlet, Schiller argued that the main cause of this national trait of indecision and high moral standards was not political, but rather a relationship with political trends, in other words that political pressure did not make it extinct, but rather perfect.[14] In response to both opinions, and in the context of the period in which The Hamletmachine is set, Heiner Müller's ideas expressed through the work lean more towards Goethe's position that the intrinsic spiritual connection between Germany and Hamlet is tied to the political context of the moment. Given that Hamlet is set in the political context of the end of the division between Eastern and Western Germany, the political-ideological contradictions between two Germany, which were the frontline of the Cold War, manifested themselves in the intensification of the political-ideological contradictions due to the specific geopolitical qualities and the deteriorating nature of communist rule within the Warsaw Pact, and this ideological contradiction was crystallised in the perceptual turmoil of the people. Heiner Müller's own position as the narrator of the work is a profound reflection of this recurrent and

turbulent thinking, a Hamletan indecision, a sense of disorientation in the face of an inherently exploitative capitalism and a gradually chauvinistic communism. In this contradictory political context, Heiner Müller argues that the root cause of this widespread indecision and disorientation is the powerlessness of the insignificant social individual in the face of the ideological conflicts brought about by the political situation. And in the face of this objective existence of indecision and powerlessness, Heiner Müller sees it as inevitable at the present time, because in two social consciousnesses with different means of exploitation - namely capitalism and chauvinistic communism - whichever path the people choose means moving from one kind of slavery to another.[15] Even the West German policy, which was considered by most people at the time to be "freedom", was not recognised by Heiner Müller, who cites Ernst Junger as a critical definition of this pseudo-concept: a certain degree of oppression was considered freedom, which was the freedom for the West.[16] The background to Heinemüller's idea was the 1989 Alexander Platz demonstration, which saw a feverish desire for an alternative social system as East to West Germany was pushed to its peak by the reforms in Eastern European countries such as Hungary, which were breaking the iron curtain of the Cold War. Heinemüller's position during this period made him an awkward 'neutral', opposed to both the East German status quo and the Western system. His performance in the Alexander Platz demonstration is a realistic Hamlet, showing hesitation, apprehension and dissipation.

These two social consciousnesses of human enslavement have some corresponding imaginative allusions in the text of Hamlet's Machine. Three naked women: Marx, Lenin, Mao' appear at the end of the fourth scene, where the three initiators of the communist idea are portrayed as women and juxtaposed in the same space and time, and the words they speak together are from Marx's A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', complete with the following: The main point is to overthrow all existing conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.[17] This was originally one of the initial ideas of communism, but before the full sentence could be shown, the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao were chopped off by the symbolic ax of revolution, a dramatic action that can be understood as the overthrow and strangulation of its original idea by communism at this time. This dramatic action can be understood as a reversal and strangulation of the original idea of communism at this time, and thus the ax in this scene is also a concrete imaginary representation of communism on the road to revisionism. The attitude towards capitalism can be perceived in 'Hail Coca-Cola'.[18] "Hail", which is a Nazi exhortation, and in Coca-Cola, which was seen as one of the symbols of the importation of American commercial culture during the Cold War. This commercial cultural import was also an important tool in the peaceful evolution of the West towards the Warsaw Pact camp in the Cold War context.The playful combination of Nazi terminology and iconic imagery of peaceful evolution shows the absurdity of the act of paying homage to consumerism, and it can be seen that the author tends to understand the peaceful evolutionary strategy of the capitalist camp as a Nazi invasion on a socio-ideological level, that is, a soft enslavement of ideas.

In addition to the textual allusions to the general state of social consciousness in Germany, the situation in East Germany is more specific, which has separate counterparts in the characters. In the plot of Shakespeare's version of Hamlet, Hamlet's mother quickly remarries to Claudius after the death of his father, and in conjunction with the fact that East Germany at the time of the creation of The Hamletmachine had entered a situation of oppression by existing communism and popular discontent and questioning, the successive successions of Hamlet's father and Claudius, in the original play, correspond respectively to the the collapse and mutative reconstruction of the concept of communism. The departed old king, who appears as a ghost in the original Shakespearean version, can be corresponded to in the text of The Hamletmachine as a ghost with ax stuck in his skull. Because of the unique connotation of the metaphor of the ghost, and because the ax here, like the ax that cuts off the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao, contains the idea of the obliteration of the original political party, the old king who dies with the ax inserted into his skull is, in the same way as the beheaded woman, a reference to the overthrow of the communist idea. And the dichotomy of Claudius as both the king who is killed with ax and seizes the ruling position, and as the brother who shares the same

bloodline as the old king, testifies to the metaphorical properties of Claudius - a new regime that has a similar outward appearance to the original concept, but overthrows him. Based on these descriptions and the social situation in East Germany in the post-Cold War period, the new regime that Claudius represents refers to the Soviet revisionist communist regime that politically oppressed the European region east of the Berlin Wall, including East Germany. And the image of the rapidly remarrying mother can be understood as East Germany or, in a broader sense, as a Soviet satellite state in Eastern Europe. Apart from the subtle conceptual similarities between the state and the mother, the more important reason for this is that these states have in common that they are at the mercy of the Soviet-centred revisionist political appeals and have no right to make their own choices, just as the mother, who marries between kings, has no personal involvement in her fate, which depends on the direction of the powerful. The mother and the Soviet satellite state (GDR) share a similar sense of powerlessness in the face of fate, just as Hamlet's comment about his mother in Shakespeare's original play: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" proves that women have a special meaning in Hamlet's Machine. As the name of the second scene in the play, 'The Europe of Woman', suggests, there is an intrinsic commonality between Europe and woman, which is also a counterpoint to the metaphor of the mother and the Eastern European satellite states.

There is another important female character in The Hamletmachine: Ophelia. The phrase "Frailty, thy name is woman!" is also a description of Ophelia, but Ophelia's Frailty is more narrowly defined and specific than that of her mother. In the third scene of the play, Hamlet and Ophelia have the only dialogue scene in the entire dramatic text: Ophelia asks Hamlet if he wants to eat her heart, and Hamlet replies that he wants to be a woman, and Hamlet is then dressed as a prostitute. This sole dialogue is a key scene in which the two characters, Hamlet and Ophelia, are contrasted, but the resolution of this scene cannot be seen in the text alone, but rather in the context of the concept of the 'machine' in the 'room' of scenes two and four. In Scene 2, Ophelia refers to her heart as a clock, and since a clock is a type of machine, it can also be understood that Ophelia's heart is a machine. In the fourth scene Hamlet's soliloquy "I want to be a machine, Arms for grabbing, Legs to walk on, no pain no thoughts. "[19] In conjunction with Hamlet's image of the indecisive thinker, it can be concluded that Hamlet and Ophelia are, in a way, two sides of the same coin: the people -thinking and giving up thinking. Furthermore, the concept of the 'whore' is present throughout the dialogue scene between Hamlet and Ophelia: Ophelia is a prostitute and Hamlet is dressed as a prostitute. "The 'prostitute' symbolises forced submission with flattery, which is closely related to the state of life of some groups in East German society at the time, most notably the artists under censorship. In the theatre, East Germany and Denmark become two contrasting spaces, which have in common that they are full of scrutiny and monitoring (three television monitors on stage).[20] The artists who survive in this environment are the Hamlets of their time, with the forced submission of thinking being their quality, while it is Ophelia who chooses not to think, but simply to submit in order to live, although she still ends up in death, it is also here that Heinemüller's dissipative attitude can be seen. In comparison, although the latter is more oppressed (hence the definition of women whose name is Frailty), it avoids the pain of hesitation and reflection, and the author's statement, through Hamlet's mouth, that he wants to be a woman can be interpreted as a kind of self-dissipation after the loneliness and pain of reflection.

These counterpoint metaphors for the characters form a subtle mirroring relationship with the real world outside the theatre, a treatment of the play that Müller calls 'temporal dislocation', fixing the work in the present, as a play-within-a-play that is inserted into the present reality in order to restore the situation in the real world.[21] Given that Shakespeare's version of Hamlet also contains the classic 'play within a play', this mirroring relationship can be seen as Heiner Müller's homage to Shakespeare's version of Hamlet.

4. THE POLITICAL THEATRE OF HEINER MÜLLER & BRECHT

Heiner Müller and Brecht, who were both German socialist playwrights, share some subtle correlations in their views on art and politics. On the other hand, Heiner Müller also defines this correlation with Brecht as a critical inheritance, arguing that "To use Brecht without criticizing him is betrayal."[22] Thus it can be seen that in maintaining agreement with some of Brecht's original values, Heiner Müller likewise achieves some self-rebellion.

Heiner Müller's heritage of Brecht in the form of his plays is mainly reflected in the manifestation of the defamiliarization effect. The Hamletmachine projects the social reality of East Germany outside the theatre onto the blueprint of a story that takes place in Denmark, leaving room for the audience to observe and reflect on this work of political insinuation. But for political theatre, the play's techniques always serve the ideas and positions, so the more important part of Heiner Müller's legacy to Brecht is in the resonance of political thinking. In an interview with Brenner, Heiner Müller talks about the way in which politics is represented in artistic production: the aim is not to make political films, but to make films politically. the key to the process of politicisation is the treatment of the material, which is a form, not simply a content. Intentionality and text are two completely different things.[23] It can be seen that, in the view of Heinemüller, intentionality, which is used to express a subjective political position in political artworks, is a crucial factor and is much more important than the content and text of the work. David Barnett, in his analysis of Brecht's theatre practice in the 1950s, points out that Brecht's theatre practice in the 1950s was a very important factor in the making of films politically, and was much more important than the content and text of the work. In his analysis of Brecht's theatre practice in the 1950s, David Barnett points out that every production Brecht directed and supervised in his theatre articulated a notion of making theatre politically. To understand the nature of Brecht's theatrical practice, it is important to make a clear distinction between making theatre politically and making political theatre. The difference lies in the fact that the former shifts the emphasis from content to form, while the latter aims at political agitation.[24] It is clear from the strong similarities in these two views that Heiner Müller shows a clear identification with Brecht's view of political theatre and internalises this view as his own theoretical guidelines in other areas of artistic production. In addition to this, there is a similar statement of position in Wekwerth's commentary on Brecht's view of theatre: Brecht's plays that contain great political arguments are not evaluated as political simply because they have political themes or sing political songs, but because they adhere to a political stance and have to promote the message that our human relationships have to be be transformed. They aim at change, whether in the political or seemingly private sphere.[25] It is thus clear that in Brecht's plays the insistence on political positions is a key element of their political embodiment, which in this case is synonymous with Intentionality in Heiner Müller's view. The mentioned political themes or political songs, on the other hand, correspond to what Heiner Müller calls content or text, which are not absent from Brecht's plays, but are relatively minor in relation to the political stance of Brecht's plays. It can therefore be deduced that by refining Brecht's view of theatre into a primary and secondary relationship between political stance and artistic content, Heiner Müller still abides by this inheritance of Brecht. Considered in turn, this becomes a detailed circumstantial evidence of Heiner Müller's inheritance of Brecht's view of political theatre.

Yet when this political stance is implemented in a more concrete attitude towards the political system of the present, Heiner Müller has something different from Brecht, which is key to the critique he generates in his succession to Brecht. As Manfred Wekwerth comments, in the expression of Brecht's view of political theatre, regardless of the primary and secondary relationship between its form and content, it remains aimed at changing its goal. This is an indirect expression of Brecht's optimistic attitude towards the political system, i.e. the idea that changeable means promising. In Brecht's view, the peculiarly Germanic compromise was the ideological root of the Nazi rise to power, but such a reading of history was unacceptable to the increasingly chauvinistic East German officialdom, which was under the control of the Soviet regime. Given this contradiction between personal perception and social context, Brecht believed that revolutionary socialism would change the face of the world in his

lifetime.[26] It can be surmised that this may be one of the reasons why his proposed socialist realism occupies a major position in the political outlook of his work. In contrast to Brecht's hopeful attitude towards socialism, Heiner Müller showed more reflection on socialism. If Brecht's vision of socialism existed in a future of constant reform, Heiner Müller was more in agreement with the initial blueprint of socialism as outlined by his predecessors, such as Marx's theory. According to Marx, communism should not appear as a religion, because religious worship is essentially a spiritual opiate, a slavery of man, whereas communism preaches a human-centred approach.[27] Heiner Müller also mentioned in his interview that Stalin was the Catholicism of East Germany.[28] On the other hand, Marx's human-centredness is derived from Plato's principle of the ideal world, and Heiner Müller confesses that "you cannot live without a utopia", which refers to Gunter Grass's "Third Way This utopia refers to the "third way" proposed by Gunter Grass, a more idealised democratic socialism.[29] The overlap of these views shows Heiner Müller's identification with Marx's theory of communism and his critical definition of East German socialism as it exists at the moment. This critical attitude towards the status quo contributed to his later dissolution of his vision of socialism, and the superficial response to this dissolution of ideals was one of attitudinal questioning and rethinking. In the Spiegel interview, Heiner Müller expresses this dissolution: I'm not sure I really want to save socialism, it's a delicate subject. Socialism never existed, it was just an idea that existed in the minds of intellectuals. In fact it was a colonisation of our own people, a Stalinist blueprint.[30] In the stage presentation of the play The Hamletmachine, this attitude is reflected in the tearing up of his own portrait: the reality of two kinds of slavery that cannot be decided and the utopian vision that is heading towards disillusionment, the irreconcilable contradiction between ideal and reality creating an inner torn Hamlet - Heiner Müller himself.

5. CONCLUSION

The Hamlet Machine is a reflective and expressive work on Heiner Müller's view of politics during the Cold War, particularly in its metaphorical text, which is rife with political allusions. The political imagery is partly an allusion to historical events, used to illustrate the political environment of Eastern Europe, and partly a subjective expression of the author's own political attitudes, an expression that is concretely embodied in a kind of rebellion and dissolution. Based on the correlation between Heiner Müller's and Brecht's attitudes towards socialism, it can be seen that in The Hamletmachine, Brecht's view of political drama is carried forward. On the other hand, this dissolving attitude of Heiner Müller's vision of socialism is also a rebellion against Brechtian optimism. One of the important reasons for the existence of this rebellion lies in the different stages of socialist development they are dealing with: Brecht's optimistic vision stemmed from his expectations of an ideal socialism beyond the Stalinist "ice age" when he was under Stalin, while Heinemüller's rebellious attitude stemmed from his double disappointment with Stalinism itself and the revisionism that followed Stalin's death, which is the thawing of the ice age, a political disillusionment that led to the dissolution of his socialist ideals. It can therefore be understood that this critique of Brecht's legacy contained in Heiner Müller is not directed at Brecht individually, but rather at the history of communism after 1953.

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