

## Translator – A Mediator in Translation: The Translated Work of Herta Müller

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### I. Introduction

Herta Müller, born on August 17, 1953 in Nitzkydorf, a Danube Swabian village in the Banat region present Romania in a German-speaking minority group of people. Her father had been employed in Waffen SS and her mother was also a victim of the World War II. All her novels reflect the sufferings, pains and trauma by the people directly or indirectly due to the War. The mental agony presented through her writings, speaks of the intensified sufferings faced by the common people which were not given much importance by the historians. When the historians traces the facts and the happenings, the literary writers brings to the fore the pains, or the hardships or the emotional side of the people of that particular period. Only by these writers, one understands the society of any particular place during any specific period.

Herta Müller, a recipient of 2009 Nobel Laureate has been praised by the Nobel committee for her handling of the language as a tool to portray the picture of the suffering people. Not all her works are translated into English, but many of her works are translated in English especially after the announcement of her winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009. The first English translation was Martin Chalmers's translation of *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* (1986) as *The Passport* (1989). The latest translated work is *Cristina and Her Double* (2013) by Geoffrey Mulligan. The tenure in between witnessed many other translated works of Müller in an uneven order of its publication in the native language of the author. *The Land of Green Plums* (1998) is the prize-winning translated work of *Herztier* (1994) by Michael Hoffmann. Valentina Glajar and Andre Lefevère's *Traveling on One Leg* (1998) is the translation of *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1989). The first collection of selected essays of Müller in German is *Niederungen* (1984) got translated in English by Sieglinde Lug as *Nadirs* (1999). *Heult wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (1997) is translated as *The Appointment* (2001) in English by Michael Hube and Philip Boehm. Müller's latest novel *Atemschaukel* (2009) appeared in English as *The Hunger Angel* (2012) translated by Philip Boehm.

There are numerous methods to probe into these translated works by applying a number of strategies, approaches and theories of translation. But, here a close analysis on the artifact of Müller – her style and the way of her presentation is successfully carried over without losing its native fervor in her English works. Her works have gained much popularity because of its voice against the totalitarian regime of Ceausescu from 1965 till his death on December 1989.

The Nobel Committee jury while awarding the Prize announced her work to possess “the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose that depicted the voice from the land of the dispossessed.” (Nobel Foundation 2009) The interplay of simplicity and complexity in her style forms the basis of the interest in understanding her texts that are translated into English. The changes between the source text and the target text are very essential in order to carry the necessary and important effect from one to the other.

Müller's style is considered to be incomprehensible. The translation involves the author's style and approach to be carried over to the targeted language and it need to provoke the readers to possess the same emotions as in the source language. Style is always crucial to the reading of a source text by its translator, because an author's style reflects and is part of that author's themes. Many critics compared Müller's style of writing in German, as she writes in a language which is spoken by the minority people of that place. Her expression in German is much more beautiful rather than in the other, Romanian language. Her style of writing is direct and beautiful. The messages are conveyed through the crisp, sharp and short poetic sentences.

The style and the subject go hand in hand in her writings. The translator gains more responsibility in carrying out the process of making the readers enjoy the writings of the author. And this carries an important message that the translator as a mediator need to make his each and every single step, a careful one without deviating from the author's own point of expressions of the emotions. And for this, the translator must possess the background knowledge of the author and his/her language, literary, political and economic, and other historical backgrounds. In short, the translator must possess the in-depth knowledge about the author. Müller's German is influenced by her village dialect which requires frequent decoding and the translator takes much pain to pertain the needs both of the author and the reader. Her usage of the language often strikes the German readers as an antique language. She remarks about it:

The German spoken there is Austrian [. . .] In the word order it is a very different German, even more so than in Austria. These Germans were a population on the margins of the empire for hundreds of years. Their language constructs sentences differently; it is slower, as if the distance from the centre had put the brakes on it. Life had a different rhythm there, and intuitively sentences were formed differently. (Haines, Brigid and Lyn Marven, 5)

The language makes it an interesting area for examining and re-examining the interplay between the universal and specific that plays a greater role in the consideration of any translation works.

Müller's language reflects her main themes: of silence, censorship, surveillance and fear. Her language is highly fragmented, full of gaps, non-sequential, repetitions and compressions. The images were of her childhood – representing witches, the wind in the leaves, gardens, trees, birds and water bodies. As Boase-Beier rightly remarks, “. . . the childhood images are often recontextualized to suggest the particular threat behind everyday life in a totalitarian state, as in the sound of the wind whispering, a common image in her work.” (192) Fragmented language is a representation of the fact that life is fragmented by its nature and every individual experiences this fragmentation in their life. These fragments are put together in order to contemplate in its later stage.

Müller's prose has been universally described to be poetic and there is no other opinion about it. There are many factors that influence this style of poetic form in prose style. There arises the question about the receivers – the readers. Do the other people, especially English speaking people, accept the translated works of a German writer? Do they receive it in the same way as they do receive their English literary works? Do the silence, the surveillance and the trauma are portrayed at the same level as in the German version of the translated works? What are the main sources that gain the importance of the non-German readers towards her fictional world? Do they experience the same effect as the native readers? What are the experiences – the bilingual atmosphere, her minority culture, life under a totalitarian dictatorship appeal the non-native readers?

As an explanation, Leech says, 'to be stylistically distinctive, a feature of language must deviate from some norm of comparison' (Leech, 55). Getting deviated from the norms, rules and standards of life is a major theme in Müller's works. Whereas the Hungarian dissident writer, György Dalos explains, 'the problem is that the past is not simply the dictatorship but also the people who lived in this dictatorship' (Boysen 2009). The dictatorship provides victims, perpetrators, victims turned perpetrators, perpetrators turned victims, and witnesses, and their role are subjected to be fully uncovered and investigated.

## **II. Conclusion**

There are peculiar norms of behavior, and the governing bodies of these norms reflect not only in the social life but also in the individual's life. *Nadirs* reflect the case of the minority people under a totalitarian regime in a child's point of view. All the incidents predicted in the novels of Müller, are in one or the other way reflect her own personal indulgence and the voices of such a minority group.

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