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ARTISTIC IMAGES OF RURAL LIFE IN THE WORKS OF GERMAN WRITER HERTA MULLER

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ABSTRACT

In this scientific article, a scientific analysis of the work of Herta Muller will be carried out. The Niederungen piece was written by Herta Muller. In this work, rural life is written on the basis of short stories. The writing of this work prompted Herta Muller to write even more famous works. The description of rural life caused a great scientific dispute on the part of scientists.

KEYWORDS

Village life, symbol, image of mother, image of daughter, image of village families.

INTRODUCTION

In a radio interview in 1989, Herta Muller underlined the subjective starting point of her literature: "It was a letter [...] against this Banat-Swabian village, against this speechless childhood, which suppressed everything." [1,1] The village becomes a consistently existing theme in Muller's works. True, some literary critics complain about "the thematic repetitions of Muller, in which they see a material thinning, accompanied by linguistic signs of wear, in which they

believe to recognize 'an artistic stagnation'" [2,7]; but conversely, the "thematic stability and the unbroken linguistic power of your literature" are praised by many reviewers. These assessments, which range from enthusiastic approval to harsh rejection, show an interest directed at the village design in Muller's works.

METHODS

This article does not aim to glorify the "appeal of the exotic in the description of a foreign world of the German-speaking minority of Romania that has disappeared from the (literary) horizon of perception"[3,117], but rather illuminates the critical reconstruction of the image of the village in Muller's debut volume *Niederungen* against the background of the actual interest in the village as a socio-historical, cultural and aesthetic objective⁶. In order to emphasize Muller's village image in tradition and upheaval, an overview of the design of the village motif in German literature is first given. Subsequently, the projection surfaces of the village - the family, the village rituals and the villagers' confrontation with the fascist past - will be examined using the relevant approaches of ritual research and memory theory. Finally, the literary staging of the village is analyzed at the levels of performance technique and language.

The anthology *das Dorf in Mythen, Märchen und Erzählungen* edited by Timur Schlender gives us an insight into the concept of the village in the texts by Theodor Storm, Ludwig Anzengruber, Gottfried Keller, Adalbert Stifter, Karl May, Clemens von Brentano and many others. The village is described on the basis of the following aspects: the village in the course of the year, couples in the village, All kinds of people in the village, mischief and injustice in the village, bad weather and misfortune in the village, eerie and supernatural things in the village. Encounter with death.[4,1]

These topics are also at the heart of the village's history. The village story is a popular genre in the narrative prose of realism between 1840 and 1890. With his *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* (Black Forest Village Stories) (1843), Berthold Auerbach gave the narrative genre the name of the village history and described "an entire village from the first to the last house." With its programmatic folklore, depiction of reality and humorous transfiguration, the village story not only emits the model of a "realistic" literature between romanticism, Naturalism, but also the fictional setting, on which the third or fourth stand should receive their right in literature.[5,390-392] According to Jürgen Hein, the village history "turns the poetic topos into reality only seemingly"[6,32], because reality dissolves in myth, in the "eternal peasantry and absolute historelessness". Even if Auerbach derives his extraordinary success "from the strangeness in the external appearance of his figures"[7,50], his figures have not yet renounced their attempt at adaptation. However, Friedrich Hebbel, who is described by Jürgen Hein as the founder of the "anti-village history", does not go beyond the thematized contrast of the "dream picture of the country and the horror picture of the city".

RESULTS

Since 1900, two opposing literary currents have emerged: the so-called modernism (progressive tension of art and science, language and form

experiment) and, as a countermovement, the Heimatkunst, which was admitted from 1933 through blood-and-soil literature until 1945 as the only publicly tolerated literature.[8,113] After 1945, the peasant epic, which was an important part of German-language literature for more than a hundred years and can be considered the centerpiece of native poetry due to its wide distribution, has been forgotten.

With her literary village design, Herta Muller revisits the village epic that has been marginalized in contemporary literature. With her writing, Muller sets in motion a process of remembrance that refers to one of the driving forces for Muller's writing. "From the long series of thematically related memory books"[9, 35]. Sibylle Cramer sees Muller's narrative as a renewal of the village's history "after its fascist fall from grace". [10, 1] In the "exactness of the visual and linguistic world", the staid realism of the village's history is overcome. Problems and sensitivities (such as threats, denunciation, flight), which can be better understood from the minority situation in Romania, are also reflected in Muller's description of the village. This distinguishes her from other contemporary writers of critical heimatliteratura such as Thomas Bernhard and Franz Innerhofer.

In her debut book *Niederungen* (1984), which consists of 16 short stories and prose sketches, Herta Muller creates a depressing chronicle of village life in Banat. The myth of the village as a place of refuge, as a place

of peace and tranquility is deconstructed in lowlands, and the rural space with beautiful scenery and untouched nature is unmasked as a complete illusion.

Herta Muller's debut volume *Niederungen* was so praised, even enthusiastically received by literary critics and the public interested in literature both in Romania and in Germany after its publication, that countrymen-organized Banat Swabians in Germany reacted so violently and angrily, as did many members of the German minority in the Banat. Muller's lowlands were perceived by critics as an imposition and she herself was described as a nest polluter. However, Delius welcomed *Niederungen* as a "rousing literary masterpiece"[11,119], which "at the same time reveals a white-gray spot on the map": "Herta Muller writes as if she is awakening – in a realm of cruelty. Because the German village, it is, in a word, hell on earth".

Being the smallest social structure, the family is an important component of village life. In contrast to traditional local literature, which praises the village and the family as a haven of security and safety, the family is constructed in Muller's lowlands as a space of coldness and strangeness. Family relations are based on a sense of alienation, which illustrates the child's dismissive attitude of protest towards the sphere of parents. The legend of carefree childhood years in a harmonious family in the countryside turns out to be a time of humiliation and depression. "With the

sharpness of an X-ray machine" Muller tears the veil of a happy family from the rural idyll:

We are a happy family, damn it, happiness evaporates in the beet pot, damn it, the steam bites off our heads from time to time, happiness bites off our heads from time to time, damn it, happiness eats our life. [12,6]

Discussion. The mother's refusal to marry this man seems impossible:

"I wanted to say at that time that I don't want to get married, but I saw the slaughtered beef, and grandfather would have killed me." The highest commandment of marriage is that the property be maintained or increased. Feelings that the spouses should connect, most often there are not. They live together in a strange and super cooled way.

The daughter's attempt to seek tenderness from her parents fails. The daughter wants to get closer to her father by combing his hair. But when she accidentally reaches into his face, the father roars and pushes her away with his elbow. The alcoholic father, whose hallmarks are authority, aggression and violence, seems strange, unapproachable and emotionally inaccessible to his daughter. With the mother, the daughter also does not get warmth, because the only joy of the mother is counting money. The mother's hands are described like this: "Only when counting money are they smooth and articulated, like spiders, when weaving a thread." [13, 98] In view of the poor

conditions of the family, the counting of money by the stingy and greedy mother becomes the epitome of the struggle for survival.

From the grandmother's stories, the daughter learns about the reasons for the disturbed relationship of family members. Looking back, the grandmother tells about the cruel behavior of her parents to put the smaller children to sleep with poppy seeds or crow dung during the day, when the adults go out into the field and to harvest. The generations of grandparents and parents have to accept how the needs of the individuals are subordinated to the economy of the village community. Parents with their fixed values and their patriarch ally oriented role pattern are to be classified as "educators". Being an "educator", you are not able to show your love to your only daughter and empathize with her.

Each member of the family has to cope with himself and, as far as possible, fit into the village community. The young protagonist is trying to restrain her inner agitation and feelings, to hide her despair and skepticism in order to at least maintain the appearance of obedience and adaptation. This is a life strategy practiced in the hierarchically ordered village, to elude constant exposure, constant attention, to immediately close oneself up again after moments of self-disclosure. Inwardly, however, the daughter resists the ways of thinking and behaving imposed by the family and the village environment. Her rebellious voice is

unmistakable in an inner monologue: “And who will she [the mother] beat when I have grown big and strong, who will there be who cannot defend himself from her hard hand”.

The exhausted, complaining, constantly crying mother, who is impotently at the mercy of the father, often beats her "wayward" daughter. The characters depicted here appear as victims of their living conditions, but also as perpetrators who forcibly suffocate everything that goes against their rigid norms. Peter Mozan calls the interchangeable perpetrator-victim relationship "the law of annihilation":

The mother harasses and terrorizes the daughter, the men kick the dogs dead, the older children beat the weaker and smaller ones, they torment the cats, the cats devour birds and mice, the worm eats the sloes, etc. Aggression and fear live side by side. [14,69]

However, the critics of the time overlooked the fact that Herta Muller "only wanted to show her compatriots a mirror with the exemplary description of encrusted structures on the village, which was promptly regarded by them as a distortion mirror." [15,61] Looking into the "mirror" reveals the exaggerated self-confidence and the better-being conceit of the Banat Swabians.

Herta Muller makes no secret of her critical assessment of the ethnocentrism of her compatriots. Cleaning,

which is justifiably considered a working virtue, is performed per formatively in lowlands. According to Janine Roberts, rituals are distinguished from customs and mere habits by their use of symbols. [16, 22]

The cleaning ritual turns into cleaning addiction, whereby the mother's body is standardized and she mutates into a working machine. According to Christoph Wulf, rituals can be understood as "symbolic coded body processes that generate and interpret, preserve and change social realities". People present themselves in rituals and ritualization's. How people are and how they understand their relationship to other people and to the world, they express in ritual stagings and arrangements. [17,74] The cleaning ritual becomes a part of village life and represents the mental and spiritual emptiness of the village environment. Work can be understood as a substitute for life for those who, like the mother figure, are not capable of a meaningful pastime.

In a review in Literaturzeitschrift Neuer Weg (Bucharest), Emmerich Reichrat pointed out that the "urban working ethos, falsified by the conceit of efficiency, makes man a process, a slave to his performance. [18,4] Herta Muller notes: "The cult of work that they (the Banat Swabians) make out of the imaginary values: order, diligence and cleanliness, words that may be attributed to them and only to them are nothing but a flimsy justification for their intolerance." [19,72]

In the village described as a "black island" [20, 50], the work ethic also turns into ritualized drudgery, destruction and self-destruction. Slaughter is an important source of income for the villagers. From the point of view of the young protagonist, the slaughter is an expression of the brutality of the adults. Often, scenes of slaughter are described, whether it is a pig, poultry or a calf.

Instead of human emotions, "the mimesis of social forms" determines the ritual events. "It is only through the mimesis of collective cultural traditions that there is a self-assurance of togetherness, community and community." Through the repetition of ritual actions, the village community tries to create meaning and to give the appearance that its organizational forms and structures are unchangeable.

The village rituals are understood in lowlands not only as "performances of a psychological, social or religious text", but also as "social institutions with a performativity surplus". This surplus is manifested in the dramaturgy, the scenic-mimetic expressivity and the performance and staging character of social action. The dullness and fatigue of a mentally and psychologically exhausted community are shown by the village rituals.

From a diverse mosaic, an oppressive village image of negative tradition bound ness, petty bourgeois and oppressive narrowness emerges in the lowlands,

whereby apt social criticism masterfully combines with high poetry. In the village, in which family and village rituals form beautiful facades, in which the fascist past is concealed, in which the collective takes over the individual by eliminating individual behavior, every remnant of idyllic wishful thinking is completely destroyed. By exposing the gruesome image of the village, Herta Muller wants to strengthen the right to individuality, where the individual threatens to become impersonal and "mechanized" in the sense of the prevailing system due to strict norm constraints.

CONCLUSION

Herta Muller has beautifully depicted rural life in an artistic manner. Herta Muller used the narrative method. Reading this work, you can learn the social environment of that time. Her later use of the narrative method led to Herta Muller receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature.

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