

## Poems by Heiner Mueller

Translation: Dennis Redmond © 2001

*Note: All passages marked in rectangles are in English in the original.*

### TELEVISION

Margarita says my father Was Howard Hughes a member Of the next/last Generation Which doesnt move its ass From the tv-chair because Outside lives man the beast On the screen at least It is flat and doesnt watch you
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### 1 GEOGRAPHY

Opposite the Hall of the People  
The monument to dead Indians  
On the PLACE OF HEAVENLY PEACE [Tiananmen Square]  
Tank-tracks

### 2 DAILY NEWS [in English] AFTER BRECHT 1989

The torn-out nails of Janos Kadar  
Who called for the tanks against his people when his comrades  
Started to hang torturers up by the feet  
His death as the betrayed Imre Nagy  
Was dug up or the rest of him

BONES AND SHOES [in English] the television was there  
Frozen with the face in the earth 1956

### WE WHO WISHED TO PREPARE THE GROUND FOR FRIENDLINESS

How much earth will we have to devour  
With the blood-taste of our victims  
On the way into a better future  
Or into none if we spit it out

### 3 SELF-CRITIQUE

My publishers rummage in old texts  
Sometimes when I read them they leave me cold Have  
I written that IN POSSESSION OF THE TRUTH  
Sixty years before my presumed death  
On the TV screen I see my fellow citizens  
Voting with hands and feet against the truth  
Which was my possession over forty years ago  
What grave [Grab: grave, trench] will protect me from my youth

### 4 FOR GUNTER RAMBOW 1990

On TV the arrest of Erich Honecker after the cancer-operation at the door of the Charite. An old man, marked by sixty years of power, which overwhelmed his reason and ground his character, hollowed out by ten years of detention in a Brandenburg prison-house, to pieces, sorrowful confirmation of Juenger's thesis of the growing disproportion between the format of the actors and their action-radius in recent history, now delivered by his creatures as a scapegoat for the people's scorn. (In the meantime the church has taken him in, an old power, which grasps only for souls and no longer after bodies). I see the pictures and think of Rambow's theater advertisements in Frankfurt, capital city of banking and prostitution and, for a brief time, political theater in the Federal Republic. ANTIGONE: Hoelderlin's republican chair, burning on the rack and ruin of the restoration. GUNDLING: the ripped-apart figure of the double-gendered falling Icarus LessingKleistFredericktheGreat, above left the NEW GERMANY flapping, a newspaper without readers, top-gallant sail of the socialist stillbirth. HAMLETMACHINE: the Hamlet-actor without a face in back a wall, his face a prison-wall. Pictures, which no actual performance could possibly match. Path-finders through the swamp, which had already begun to close over the provisional grave of utopia, which will perhaps reappear, when the phantom of the market economy, which dispelled the spectre of communism, shows its new customers its cold shoulder, showing to the emancipated the iron face of its freedom. (1990)

## Two Letters

1

I see you sweating at the typewriter  
Manufacturing corruptible verse  
On the death by strangulation in the network  
Of necessary laws. The masons, you write  
Would soon be needed as mortar  
For the building of the Great Wall, and ever  
And again are Great Walls built. Nothing new  
Under the sun, you write. You write nothing new.  
You have learned to beg questions.  
The applause which deafens you: is it none?  
The quickest effects are not the newest.  
A meeting on the evening after our talk:  
Two republicans on the way to bed  
Discussing democracy  
Finethatstheformbutwheresthecontent  
They count the years according to wage-increases  
The months after the appearance of the Magazine  
Each wise in the way of Keuner  
Not a thought which doesn't go through the belly  
And as in Buechner no fear before priestly garb  
They have small horizons, but are right  
When they say, reading your verse:  
What's this Somebody actually saying to us?  
Doesn't he understand the role of the land reform?

2

What can a rhyme do against the knuckleheads  
You ask. Nothing, say some, others: little.  
Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, a tragedy  
History of a man whom threw his knowledge away  
Bent himself to stupid traditions.  
He did not stamp out the stupidity.  
Did he want to write nothing more than a form letter?  
Hamlet the Dane Prince and grsit for worms stumbling  
Dully from hole to hole to the last hole  
In back the spectre which made him  
Green like Ophelias flesh in the cradle  
The horizon of the armaments lasts longer  
And shortly before the third crowing of the cock  
A fool tore the jesters' bells of the philosopher  
Crawled a white-bellied bloodhound into the tank.  
Or the misunderstood Bertolt Brecht  
With great tenacity and a bit of hope  
He too could no more than bend the bow  
How many knuckleheads survived him.  
All his life long he sought the possibility  
Of not killing the next-door-neighbor. Towards the end  
He saw them coming from far off  
Half-hidden in a blood-drenched mist.  
[Johannes] Becher sweated writing his sonnets  
For the concourse of the Volga and Neckar.  
Will the Jura farmers have read  
the Sonnettwerk, if Communism takes  
the ground off their shoulders?  
For us the span between Nothing and Little.

### **The Politics of Culture According to Boris Dyacenko**

Boris Dyacenko said to me After the ban  
On my novel Heart and Ashes Part two  
Which described for the first time  
The terrors of the liberation of the RED ARMY  
My censor invited me to a private discussion  
And the official [beamteten] reader showed me proudly the forbidden  
Typescript bound in costly leather THUS  
I LOVE YOUR BOOK WHICH I HAD TO FORBID  
IN THE INTEREST YOU UNDERSTAND OF OUR COMMON AFFAIR  
In the future said Boris Dyacenko  
The forbidden books will be bound  
IN THE INTEREST YOU UNDERSTAND OF OUR COMMON AFFAIR  
In leather gouged from the skins of the authors

Let's keep our skins intact said Boris Djacenko  
So that our books will outlast the time of the official [beamteten] readers  
in a more durable edition.

### **Nighttrain BerlinFriedrichstrasse Frankfurtmain**

After the journey through the lightless homeland the hatred of lamps.  
Such a colorful corpse! I AM DEATH COME FROM ASIA

### **Soft raindrops on dust**

The pasture by the inn  
Will become green, by and bye  
But you Sir should drink wine before your departure  
For you will find no friends  
When you come to the Gates of Go  
(for Erich Honecker after Ezra Pound and Rihaku)

### **PICTURES**

Pictures signify everything in the beginning. Are keepable. Roomy.  
But the dreams congeal, become form and disillusionment.  
Already the sky holds no more pictures. The clouds, seen from an  
airplane: steam which takes away the view. The crane only a bird.  
Even Communism, the final picture, which is always refreshed  
Because washed with blood again and again, the everyday  
Pays it out with small coins, unshiny, blind with sweat  
Ruins, the great poems, like bodies, long loved and  
No longer needed now, on the way to the much-used final species.  
Between the lines a wailing

on bones the stone-bearer happy

For the Beautiful signifies the possible end of Horror.

### **BRECHT**

Truly, he lived in gloomy times.  
The times have become lighter.  
The times have become gloomier.  
When the light says, I am the gloom  
It has spoken the truth.  
When the gloom says, I am  
The light, it does not lie.

## THE FATHER

1

A dead father would perhaps  
Have been a better father. Best of all  
Is a stillborn father.  
Grass grows ever anew over the border.  
The grass must be torn up  
Again and again which grows over the border.

2

I wished my father were a shark  
Which had ripped apart forty whalers  
(And I had learned to swim in their blood)  
My mother a blue-whale my name Lautreamont  
Died in Paris  
1871 unknown

## OLD POEM

Night while swimming across the sea the moment  
Which put you in question There is no one else  
Finally the truth That you are only a citation  
Out of a book you have not written  
Against which you can write at length on your  
Fading ink-ribbon The text breaks through

THE LUCKLESS ANGEL Behind him swims the past, shaking thunder from wing and shoulder, with a noise like buried drums, while before him the future jams up, his eyes pressed in, the eyeballs explode like a star, the word wound up into a vibrating mouth-gag, strangling him with his breath. For a long time one still sees his wings beating, hears in the roaring the hail of stones fall down before over behind him, the louder the more violent the movement in vain, scattered, when they become slower. Then the moment closes over him: on the quickly rubble-filled standing place the luckless angel comes to rest, waiting for History in the petrification of flight breath glance. Till the renewed roaring of mighty wing-beats reproduces itself in waves through the stone and indicates his flight.

## ALONE WITH THESE BODIES

States utopias  
Grass grows  
On the rail-tracks  
The words decay  
On the paper  
The eyes of women  
Grow colder  
Farewell to tomorrow  
STATUS QUO

## TOOTH DECAY IN PARIS

Something eats at me

I smoke too much  
I drink too much

I die too slowly

[Untitled]

During the passage past the Charlottenburg Castle Park suddenly the sorrow  
GREEN IS THE COLOR OF CALAMITY The trees belong to the dead

## SOMETIMES WHEN I ENJOY MY PRIVILEGES

For example on the airplane whiskey from Frankfurt to (West)Berlin  
I'm overcome by what the idiots at the SPIEGEL call  
My raging love for my country  
Wild like the embrace of someone believed dead  
Queen of Hearts on Judgement Day

[Untitled]

in the mirror my sliced-open body  
separated in the middle by the operation  
which saved my life what for  
for a child a woman a late work  
learning to live with the half machine  
breathing eating forbidden the question what for  
which falls too lightly from the lips death  
is what's simple any idiot can die  
28.10.1994

[Untitled]

surfacing in the isolation chamber  
out of the black hole on the operation table  
the rendezvous with death took place  
no trace in the memory colorless  
lightning in the darkness silent thunder  
under the knife the categories disintegrate  
in the drop the philosophemes  
couple  
Hegel and Kant Marx kisses Nietzsche  
October 1994