

Heiner Müller

SHAKESPEARE A DIFFERENCE

Attempt to write about Shakespeare between Berlin, Frankfurt, Milan, Genoa. The horror of formulation grows along with the stack of notes. Nearest to Shakespeare in Genoa, by night in the medieval center of the city and near the harbor. Narrow alleys, in medieval times they were chained off against the people, between the palaces of the aristocracy of the city-state, the Dorias for example, which Udo Lindenberg has popularized. On the wall of a house the spray-painting: WELCOME TO HELL NO PITY HERE [in English]. The entire thing like the path to the GLOBE in Giordano Bruno's description, past bars bordellos murder-pits. Memory of the first reading: HAMLET from the school library, in spite of the teacher's warning to the thirteen-year-old concerning the difficulty of the original. A black leather binding, the stamp of the former high school of the grand duchy on the title page. I suspected more than I understood; the leap drives experience, not the step. The play itself is the attempt to describe an experience which has no reality in the era of the description. An end-game in the rosy dawn of an unknown day. BUT LOOK, THE MORN IN RUSSET MANTLE CLAD / WALKS O'ER THE DEW OF YON HIGH EASTWARD HILL. Nearly four hundred years later a different kind of reading: CLOAKED IN THE RED MANTLE THE MORNING TREADS / THROUGH THE DEW WHICH SHINES IN ITS PATH LIKE BLOOD.

In between lies, for my generation, the long march through the Hells of the Enlightenment, through the blood-swamps of the ideologies. Hitler's geographical lapsus: genocide in Europe instead of, in keeping with standard practice past and present, Africa Asia America. The St. Vitus' dance of the dialectic in the Moscow trials. The lidless gaze of the reality of the work- and extermination-camps. The village-against-the-city utopia of Pol Pot, reader of Hegel and connoisseur of Verlaine. The belated Jewish revenge on the wrong object, the classic case of retroactive obedience. The lockjaw of a shattered party suddenly stricken with victory, in the context of the power given to it or arrogated to it in the ration-economy [Mangelwirtschaft] of real socialism. THE SCARS CRY OUT FOR WOUNDS AND THE POWER / COMES OVER THEM LIKE A BLOW. The clinch of revolution and counter-revolution as the fundamental figure of the mammoth catastrophes of the 20th century. Shakespeare is a mirror through time, our hope is a world he no longer reflects. We have not yet arrived at ourselves, so long as Shakespeare writes our plays. The opening lines of MIRANDAS SONG [in English] from Audens commentary on the TEMPEST: MY DEAR ONE IS MINE AS MIRRORS ARE LONELY [in English] is a Shakespeare-metaphor, which reaches beyond Shakespeare. NO MORE HEROES / NO MORE SHAKESPEAROS goes the chorus of a punk-song. A Hoelderlin-fragment describes Shakespeare at his most chthonic [unerloesten: unredeemed, awaiting transfiguration]: WILDSTRAINING / IN THE FEARSOME ARMOR / MILLENIA. Shakespeare's wilderness. What is he waiting for, why in armor, and for how much longer. Shakespeare is a secret, why should I be the one to give it away, provided that I knew it, and why in Shakespeare-distant Weimar. I accepted the invitation and now stand before you, sand in my hands, it runs through my fingers. HAMLET is a favored object of the interpreters. For Eliot the Mona Lisa of literature, a miscarried play; the remains of the revenge-drama, a market-driven genre of its era just like today's horror film, stiffly extrude into the new construction, hindering Shakespeare's material from developing. A discourse which the silence breaks. The dominance of monologue is no accident: Hamlet has no partner. For Carl Schmitt a consciously, due to political grounds, confused and obscure text, begun in the reign of Elizabeth, completed after the seizure of power of the first Stuart, son of a mother who

married the murderer of her husband and who died under the axe, a Hamlet-figure. The break-in of time into the play constitutes mythos. Mythos is an aggregate, a machine, to which ever new and different machines can be connected. It transports energy, until its ever-increasing acceleration explodes the realm of culture. My first hurdle in the reading was Horatio's disconcerting speech, disconcerting in the mouth of a student of Wittenberg, during the entrance of the dead on the coast of Helsingoer. IN THE MOST HIGH AND PALMY STATE OF ROME / A LITTLE ERE THE MIGHTIEST JULIUS FELL / THE GRAVES STOOD TENANTLESS AND THE SHEETED DEAD / DID SQUEAK AND GIBBER IN THE ROMAN STREETS; / AS STARS WITH TRAINS OF FIRE AND DEWS OF BLOOD, / DISASTERS IN THE SUN; AND THE MOIST STAR / UPON WHOSE INFLUENCE NEPTUNE'S EMPIRE STANDS, / WAS SICK ALMOST TO DOOMSDAY WITH ECLIPSE... History in the context of nature.

Shakespeare's gaze is the gaze of the epoch. Never before had interests been so nakedly displayed, without the fold of the weave, the costuming of the ideas. MEN HAVE DIED FROM TIME TO TIME AND WORMS HAVE EATEN THEM, BUT NOT FROM LOVE. The dead have their place on his stage, nature has the right to vote. That means, in the language of the 19th century, which is still a conference-language between the Oder and the Elbe; Shakespeare has no philosophy, no sense of history: his Romans are from London. In the meantime the war of the landscapes which work for the disappearance of the human beings which ravaged them is no longer a metaphor. Gloomy times, when a conversation about trees is practically a crime. The times have become brighter, the shadows have gone out, a crime now to be silent over trees. The terror emanating from Shakespeare's reflections is the recurrence of the same. A terror, which drove Nietzsche, the godforsaken pastor's son, out of the misery of the philosophies into his sword-dance with ghosts from the future, from the silence of the academies to the red-hot high-wire of history, spanned BY AN IDIOT FULL OF SOUND AND FURY and TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW. The stress is on the And, the truth travels in the lower berths, the abyss is the hope. Wassili Grossman portrayed Stalin, the deserved murderer of the people, as Brecht called him, as having visions of the murdered Trotsky, creator of the Red Army and executioner of Kronstadt, return a thousand-fold in the German tank wreckage piled up outside Moscow. A Shakespeare-variation: Macbeth sees Banquos ghost, and a difference. Our task, lest the rest become statistics and a mere matter for computers, is the labor of difference. Hamlet, the failure, did not achieve it, this is his crime. Prospero is the undead Hamlet: at least he breaks his staff, in reply to Caliban's, the new Shakespeare reader's, still-relevant reproach on all hitherto existing culture:

YOU TAUGHT ME LANGUAGE AND MY PROFIT ON'T
IS I KNOW HOW TO CURSE [in English]

Translator's notes: This is a speech Mueller gave at the Shakespeare festival in Weimar on April 23, 1988. Translated by Dennis Redmond.