

[1960s]

Translator's note: An excerpt from Heiner Mueller's 1961 play Tractor:

The feeling of failure, the consciousness of defeat during the reading of old texts is thorough. The attempt, to cast the failure on the material, the material (a cannibalistic vocabulary – “We are such stuff as dreams are made of” [in English]), to the history of the amputated hero: it can happen to anyone, it signifies nothing: for one blood-poisoning suffices, the other is luckier, he needs a war. Refuge [Ausflucht]: Europa is a ruin, in the ruins the dead are not counted. Truth is concrete, I breathe stones. People, which do their work, so that they can buy their bread, have no time for such considerations. But what's hunger to me. Irrecuperability [Uneinholbarkeit] of the process [Vorgang] through the description; incompatibility of writing and reading; expulsion of the reader out of the text. Puppets, stuffed with words instead of with sawdust. Heart-flesh. The need for a language, which noone can read, increases. Who is noone. A speech without words. Or the disappearance of the world into words. Instead of the lifelong compulsion to watch, the bombardment of the images (tree house woman). The eyelids blown away. The opposite out of the gnashing of teeth, fires and song. The garbage-pail of literature in the back.

The dissolution of the world into images

Translator's note: Below are two prose excerpts from Mueller's play Zement, completed in 1972 (note that the choppy sentence-fragments at the end of the second part are reproduced exactly as in the original):

Prometheus, who delivered lightning to humanity, but did not teach them how to use it against the gods, because he partook of the meals of the gods, which would have been less sumptuous if shared with humanity, was fastened because of his deed or conversely because of his dismissal from the service of the gods by Hephaestos the blacksmith to the Caucasus, where a dog-headed eagle devoured his perpetually growing liver every day. The eagle, who considered him a partially edible, rock-encrusted meal which occasionally gave rise to discordant song while being eaten, also emptied itself on him. The excrement was his nourishment. He passed it further, transformed into his own excrement, to the stone beneath him, so that when Hercules, his liberator, climbed the desolate mountain after three thousand years, he could already discern the fettered one from a great distance, shimmering white from bird excrement, however, thrown back again and again by the wall of stench, circled around the massif for another three thousand years, while the dog-headed one continued to eat the liver of the fettered one and nourished him with its excrement, so that the stench increased to the same extent that the liberator got used to it. Finally, favored by a rain which lasted five hundred years, Hercules was able to draw within shooting distance. There he held his nose with one hand. Three times he missed the eagle, because he had involuntarily closed his eyes, dazed by the waves of stench which struck him when he took the hand from his nose to

draw the bow. The third arrow slightly wounded the fettered one on the left foot, the fourth killed the eagle. Prometheus, it is said, wept for the eagle, his only companion for three thousand years and provider for three thousand years twice over. Am I supposed to eat your arrows, he screamed and, forgetting that he had known other nourishment: can you fly, peasant, with your feet of dung. And vomited from the stall-odor which hung about Hercules, ever since he had cleansed the stalls of Augeas, because the dung stank to Heaven. Eat the eagle, said Hercules. But Prometheus could not understand the meaning of his words. He probably knew, too, that the eagle had been his last connection with the gods, his daily blow of the beak their memory for him. More agitated than ever in his fetters he cursed his liberator as a murderer and tried to spit in his face. Hercules, bent over with disgust, sought meanwhile the fetters, with which the raging one was fastened to his prison. Time, weather and excrement had made flesh and metal indistinguishable from each other, both out of stone. Loosened by the violent movements of the fettered one they became visible. It turned out that they were already eaten away by rust. Only at his sex were the fetters intertwined with flesh, because Prometheus had occasionally masturbated, at least during his first two thousand years on the rock. Later he had even forgotten his sex. The liberation left a scar. Prometheus could have easily freed himself, if he had not feared the eagle, defenseless and exhausted from the millennia as he was. His behavior during the liberation showed that he feared freedom more than the bird. Howling and foaming at the mouth, with claws and teeth, he defended his fetters against the onslaught of the liberator. Freed, on hands and knees, howling in the misery of the continuation with benumbed appendages, he screamed for his peaceful place on the stone, under the wing of the eagle, with no other change of scenery than the one provided by the gods through occasional earthquakes. Even after he could finally stand upright, he averted himself against the descent like an actor who doesn't want to leave the stage. Hercules had to haul him off on his shoulders. The descent to humanity lasted another three thousand years. While the gods tore the mountains to bits of earth, so that the descent through the frenzy of stone chunks was more like a fall, Hercules bore his precious haul so that it did not come to harm, like a child tucked away on his arm. Clasped to the neck of the liberator, Prometheus told him the direction of the missiles in a soft voice, so that they could avoid most of them. In the meantime he insisted on his innocence of the liberation, screaming aloud to the Heavens, which was obscured by the frenzy of stones. There followed the suicide of the gods. One after the other threw themselves from Heaven onto the back of Hercules and disintegrated into thunder. Prometheus worked himself back to a place on the shoulder of the liberator and struck the pose of the victor, riding on a steed lathered with sweat towards the jubilation of the populace.

[Second excerpt from Zement]:

Hercules 2 or the Hydra

For long he believed he was still striding through the forest, in the numbingly warm wind, which seemed to blow from all sides and move the trees like snakes, following the barely visible blood-trail of the regularly pulsing ground in an always similar twilight, alone in the battle with the animal. In the first days and nights, or were they only hours,

how could he measure the time without the sky, he even asked himself sometimes, what might be under the ground, which beat in waves underneath his footsteps so that it seemed to breathe, how thin the skin over the unknown thing beneath and how long would it hold it back from the entrails of the world. When he stepped more carefully, it seemed to him as if the ground, which he had believed would yield to his weight, approached his foot and even drew it to itself, with a sucking movement. He also had the clear feeling that his feet were getting heavier. He counted the possibilities. 1) His feet were getting heavier and the ground was sucking at his feet. 2) He felt his feet getting heavier, because the ground sucked at them. 3) He had the impression that the ground sucked at his feet, because they had gotten heavier. The question preoccupied him for a length of time (years hours minutes). He found the answer in the increasing feeling of vertigo, caused by the concentrically blowing wind: his feet were not getting heavier, the ground was not sucking at his feet. The one like the other was a perceptual illusion, determined by his falling blood pressure. This relieved him and he went faster. Or did he merely believe he was going faster. When the wind increased, he was lashed by trees and branches more often on the face neck hands. The touch was at first rather pleasant, a caress or as if they were testing, although superficially and without particular interest, the texture of his skin. Then the forest seemed to thicken, the kind of touch changed, the caressing became a measuring. Like at the tailor's, he thought, when the branch circumscribed his head, then the neck, then the breast, the waist etc., the forest seemed to be interested even in his step, until it had taken his measure from head to toe. The automatic nature of the proceedings irritated him. Who or what directed the movements of these trees, branches or whatever else out there was interested in his hat number collar width shoe size. Could this forest, which resembled no forest he knew, had "walked through", be named a forest at all. Perhaps he himself had been underway too long, a geological epoch too long, and forests were simply and purely what this forest was. Perhaps it was only a matter of the naming of a forest and all other characteristics had long since become invalid and interchangeable, even the animal which he meant to slaughter by striding through this factuality [Gegebenheit: condition], provisionally named the forest, the monster to be killed, which had transformed time into an excrement in space, was still only the naming of something no longer recognizable with a name from an old book. Only he, the unnamed one, had remained the same in his long sweat-inducing path to the battle. Or was what walked on his legs over the increasingly faster dancing ground also a different one than he. He was still thinking about it, when the forest once more gripped him. The factuality studied his skeleton, the number, strength, arrangement, function of the bones, the linking of the joints. The operation was painful. It was difficult not to scream. He threw himself forwards in a quick spurt out of the pincers [Umklammerung: embrace]. He knew, he'd never run faster. He did not get any further, the forest kept up with the tempo, he remained in the pincers, which locked around him and pressed his entrails together, his bones rubbed against each other, how long could he stand the pressure, and understood, in the rising panic: the forest was the animal, for some time now the forest he thought he was walking through had been the animal, which bore him in the tempo of his steps, the ground-waves were his gasps and the wind his breath, the trail which he followed was his own blood, of which the forest, which was the animal, since when, how much blood does a human being have, took its sample; and that he had always known it, only not by name. Something like a lightning-bolt without

beginning or end described a white-hot current of electricity through his veins and nerve-stems. When the pain overwhelmed the controls over his bodily functions, he heard himself laugh. It sounded like relief: no more thought, that was the battle. Adapting to the movements of the enemy. Avoiding them. Anticipating them. Meeting them. Adapting oneself and not adapting. Adapting by not adapting. Avoiding by attacking. Attacking by avoiding. Anticipating the first blow grab thrust cut and avoiding the second. The other way around. The sequence changes and does not change. Meeting the attack with the same movement and (or) a different one. The patience of the ocean and the violence of the axe. He had never counted his hands. Nor did he need to count them now. Wherever he needed them, they performed his work, fists at the ready, each finger individually usable, the nails separated, the edges from the elbows. His feet held fast to the increasingly quickly rotating ground, which was rebelling against gravitation, the personal union of enemy and battlefield, the lap which wanted to hold him. The old equation. Every lap he somehow ended up in, wanted at some point to be his grave. And the old song. *Oh stay with me and do not go Next to my heart is the most beautiful place.* Scansioned by the cracking of his spine in the motherly chokehold. *Death to the mothers.* His teeth recalled a time before the knife. In the confusion of the tentacles, which could not be distinguished from the rotating knives and axes, the rotating knives and axes, not from the tentacles, the knives axes tentacles, not from the exploding minefields carpet-bombing neon signs bacterial cultures, knives axes tentacles minefields carpet-bombing, not from his own hands feet teeth in the provisional battle which is named space-time out of blood gelatin flesh, such that the blows against the substance of the self which occasionally occurred, the pain or conversely the sudden increase of incessant pain in what was no longer perceptible was his sole barometer, in permanent annihilation leading always anew back to its smallest components, always assembling anew out of his ruins in permanent reconstruction, sometimes he put himself together wrong, left hand on right arm, hip-bone on upper arm-bone, due to haste or lack of attention or confused by the voices, which sang in his ears, choruses of voices *stay in line relax already give up* or because he was bored always putting the same hand on the same arm trimming constantly-growing tentacles shrunken heads bowties, standing up on the stumps, pillars out of blood; sometimes he delayed his reconstruction, waiting eagerly for total annihilation with hope in nothingness, the unending pause, or out of fear of victory, which could only be won by the total annihilation of the animal, which was his residence, except perhaps for the nothingness which waited for him or for noone; in the white silence, which announced the beginning of the final round, he learned to read the always different building-plan of the machine, which he was stopped being was again different with every glance grasp step, and that he thought changed wrote it with the handwriting of his labors and deaths.

Translator's notes: This brief text, written in the 1960s, is a parody of the GDR institution of the public suggestion-box, wherein citizens deposited anonymous complaints, observations, and pleas to the local Party committee, in the hopes that some higher official might take up their case.

TO THE MOUNTAIN-CLIMBERS. An inhabitant of the cottages begs humbly for your esteemed attention. Perhaps, when you put a hand over your eyes, you still see us. Or have you risen so high, that you cannot discern our tiny village anymore, the impoverished settlements with the freshly-painted window-shutters, nestled under the new churches, filled to the brim on holidays, is it only the clouds, which block your columns from the gaze of the curious, or the morning fog? O Divine Ones, wending dry feet over the rain with nailed shoes, read a mass for us on the mountaintop! Incidentally why ever did you take the umbrellas with you? At least send down the lift again, if you no longer need it, your Highnesses.

[1974]

MEDEA PLAY

A bed is lowered from the flies and stood upright. Two female characters with death-masks bring a girl on stage and position her with the back to the bed. Dressing of the bride. With the girdle of the bridal dress she is tied to the bed. Two male characters with death-masks bring the groom and place him facing the bride. He stands on his head, walks on his hands, turns cartwheels before her etc.; she laughs soundlessly. He tears the bridal dress and takes his place on the bride. Projection: sexual act. With the scraps of the bridal clothes the male death-masks tie the hands and the female death-masks the feet of the bride to the bed. The rest serves as a gag. While the man stands on his head before the (female) audience, walks on his hands, turns cartwheels etc., the belly of the woman swells, until it bursts. Projection: birth-act. The female death-masks pull a child from the belly of the woman, loosen her hand-bindings, lay the child in her arms. Simultaneously the male death-masks have hung so many weapons on the man, that he can only continue to move on all fours. Projection: act of killing. The woman takes her face off, tears the child apart and throws the pieces in the direction of the man. Out of the flies falls rubble limbs intestines on the man.

[1975]

Translator's notes: The asterisked lines mark a German translation from Shakespeare, whose original line reads: "But look, the morn in russet mantle clad/ walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill." All italics are rendered as in the original.

PROJECTION 1975

Where is the tomorrow which we saw yesterday

*The early bird sings all through the night
Cloaked in the red mantle the morning treads**

*Through the dew which shines in its path like blood**

I read, what I have written three, four, twenty years ago, like the text of a dead author, from a time, when a death still fit into verse. The murderers have ceased to scan their victims. I remember my first attempt to write a play. The text was lost in the confusion of the postwar years. It began with the (young) hero standing in front of the mirror and trying to find out, which road the worms would take through his flesh. At the end he stood in the cellar and sliced up his father. In the century of Orestes and Elektra which dawns, Oedipus will be a comedy.

[1981]

Translator's notes: Description of a Picture was written in 1981. Mueller wrote the below introduction, which casts an intriguing light on Mueller's later technique of writing transcripts of "interviews" with himself. As much of the original word-order and typography have been reproduced as possible; any necessary explanations (obscure references, untranslatable puns, etc.) are marked in square brackets.

DESCRIPTION OF A PICTURE can be read as a painting over of Alcestis [play by Euripides], which cites the Noh-drama KUMASAKA, the 11th Canto of the Odyssey, Hitchcock's The Birds and Shakespeare's The Tempest. The text describes a landscape beyond death. The action goes any way you like, since the consequences are past, explosion of a memory in an extinct dramatic structure.

DESCRIPTION OF A PICTURE

A landscape between steppe and savanna, the sky Prussian blue, two enormous clouds swim therein, as if held together by wire frame, albeit of an unknown construction, the leftmost larger one could be an inflatable animal from an amusement park, torn loose from its moorings, or a piece of Antarctica homewards bound, on the horizon a flat mountain range, to the right in the landscape a tree, on closer inspection there are three trees of various height, mushroom-shaped, trunk next to trunk, perhaps out of one root, the house in the foreground more industrial product than handcrafted, probably cement: a window, a door, the roof covered by the foliage of the tree, which stands in front of the house, overgrowing it, it belongs to a different species than the group of trees in the background, its fruit looks like it might be edible, or suited to poison guests, a glass bowl on a garden-table, still half in the shadow of the tree's crown, holding six or seven examples of the citrus-like fruit ready, from the position of the table, a crude piece of handiwork, the crossed legs are rough-hewn young birch saplings, it can be concluded, that the sun, or whatever casts light on this area, stands at the moment of the picture at its zenith, perhaps THE SUN is standing there forever and IN ETERNITY: one cannot tell from the picture if it is moving, even the clouds, if they are clouds, are perhaps swimming in place, the wire frame their attachment to a stained blue plank with the arbitrary designation SKY, a bird perches on a tree limb, the foliage hides its identity, it

can be a vulture or a peacock or a vulture with a peacock's head, gaze and beak aimed at a woman, who takes up the right half of the picture, her head divides the sweep of the mountains, the face is soft, very young, the nose overlong, with a swelling at the root, perhaps from the blow of a fist, the gaze aimed at the ground, as if it cannot forget a picture and or does not want to see another, the hair long and straggled, blond or greyish white, the harsh light permits no distinction, the clothing a moth-eaten fur coat, tailored for broader shoulders, over a threadbare thin shirt, probably made of linen, from the right sleeve greatly frayed at one point a fragile lower arm raises a hand to the level of the heart, that is to say the left breast, a gesture of defense or from the language of deaf-mutes, the defense wards off a familiar terror, the blow kick stab has occurred, the shot fired, the wound no longer bleeds, the repetition strikes the void, where fear has no place, the face of the woman becomes legible, if the second assumption is right, a rat-face, an angel of the rodents, the jaws grind the corpses of words and the garbage of speech, the left jacket-sleeve hangs in tatters as if after an accident or assault of something which tears, animal or machine, strange, that the arm is not injured, or are the brown flecks on the sleeve congealed blood, does the gesture of the long-fingered right hand manifest pain in the left shoulder, does the arm hang so limply in the sleeve, because it is broken, or crippled by a flesh-wound, the base of the arm's hand is cut off by the edge of the picture, the hand could be a claw, a (perhaps blood-encrusted) stump or a hook, the woman stands up to her knees in nothingness, amputated by the edge of the picture, or does she grow out of the ground like the man steps from the house and disappears inside like the man in the house, until the one unceasing motion is put in gear which explodes the frame, the flight, the drive-work raining roots clods of earth and ground-water, visible between glance and glance, if the eye SEEING ALL closes itself squinting over the picture, between tree and woman wide open the large single window, the drapes are blowing out, the storm seems to come from the house, no trace of wind in the trees, or is the woman attracting the storm, or summoning it up by her appearance, which has waited for her in the ashes of the fireplace, who or what was burnt, a child, another woman, a lover, or are the ashes her own actual remains, the body borrowed from the rich funds [aus dem Fundus] of the cemeteries, the man in the door-opening, the right foot still halfway on the threshold, the left already firmly on the brown grass-flecked soil, parched by an unknown sun, holding in the right hand of the outstretched arm with a hunter's grip, there where one tears off the wings, a bird, the left hand, which is outfitted with overlong curved flapping fingers, strokes the plumage, which the fear of death has ruffled, the beak of the bird is torn open by a cry soundless to the observer, silent also for the bird in the tree, it does not concern itself with birds, the skeleton of its fellow species on the black-veined inner wall, visible through the rectangle of the window, which it cannot see from its place on the tree, would have no message for it, the man smiles, his step is forceful, a dance-step, it's not clear if he has already seen the woman, perhaps he is blind, his smile the caution of the blind, he sees with the feet, every stone, which his feet strikes, laughs at him, or the smile of the murderer, who goes to work, what will happen on the table with intertwined legs with the full fruit-bowl and the overturned smashed wine glass, in which the remains of a black liquid still dribbles, spreading over the table and dripping over the edge onto the ground under the table in pools, the high-backed chair in front has a peculiarity: its four legs are bound with wire halfway up, as though to prevent it from collapsing, a second chair lies tossed aside to the right behind the tree, the backrest

broken off, the wiring only a Z, not a rectangle, perhaps an earlier attempt at a reinforcement, what sort of burden has broken the chair, rendered the other infirm, a murder perhaps, or a wild sexual act, or both in one, the man on the chair, the woman on him, his member in her sheath, the woman still weighed down by the grave-earth, out of which she worked herself, in order to visit the man, by the ground-water, dripping from her fur coat, her movement at first a soft rocking, then an increasingly violent riding, until the orgasm presses the back of the man against the back of the chair, which gives way with a crash, the back of the woman against the edge of the table, knocking over the wine glass, the bowl laden with fruit starts to slide and, when the woman throws herself to the front, her arms clasping the man, his arms under the fur coat clasping her, he biting into her neck, she into his, comes once again to rest just before the edge along with the table, or the woman on the chair, the man standing behind her, his hands thumb on thumb laid around her neck, as if playing at first, only the middle fingers touch each other, then, when the woman bolts upright against the back of the chair, her finger nails clawing into his arm-muscles, the arteries of her neck and brow bulging, her head filling with blood, the face turning blue-red [blaurot: connoting drunken red], her shuddering legs thrashing against the flat of the table, the wine glass falls over, the bowl starts sliding, the strangler closes the circle, thumb on thumb, finger on finger, until the hands of the woman fall from his arms and the soft cracking of the larynx or the neckbone indicates the end of the labor, perhaps it is now, when the man retrieves his hands, that the back of the chair gives way under that once again dead weight or the woman falls forwards, with the blue-red face on the wine glass, out of which a dark liquid, wine or blood, seeks its path to the ground, or is the splayed shadow on the neck of the woman under the chin congruent with a knife-cut, the streamers of dried blood from the neck-wide wound, black with encrusted blood too the strands of hair to the right of the face, the trace of the left-handed murderer on the doorstep, his knife writes from right to left, he will need it again, it bulges in the material of his jacket, when the broken glass reassembles itself out of the shards and the woman steps towards the table, no scar on the neck, or will it be the woman, the thirsty angel, who bites open the throat of the bird and pours its blood from the open neck into the glass, the nourishment of the dead, the knife is not for the bird, the face of the man is the color of the ground up to the height of the eyes, brow and visible hand, the other is hidden by the grasp in the plumage, are as white as paper, during labor outdoors he seems to wear gloves, why not in the moment of the picture, and something like a hat against the hot star, which illuminates the landscape and bleaches out its colors, what can his labor be, aside from the perhaps daily murder of the perhaps daily resurrected woman, in this landscape, animals appear only as clouds, not to be grasped by hand, the bird in the tree is the last reserve, one trilling call will catch it, superfluous to tear up the grass, the SUN, perhaps a multiplicity of SUNS, are burning it, the fruits of the bird-tree are quickly plucked, have the flapping fingers of the strangler knitted the steel net around the flat mountain range, out of which only one paper-white mountaintop still juts out unprotected, protection from the falling rocks, loosed by the wandering of the dead in the innermost earth, which are the secret pulse of the planet, the pulse is what the picture means, protection with some prospect of duration perhaps, when the growth of the cemeteries with the small weight of the presumed murderer on the threshold, of the quickly digested bird in the tree, the wall [Wand: interior wall] has room for its skeleton, has reached its limit, or does the movement reverse itself, when the dead are all present,

the murmur of the graves in the storm of the resurrection, which drives the snakes from the mountain, is the woman with the secret glance and the mouth like a suction cup a MATA HARI of the underworld, a scout, scouring the terrain, on which the Great Maneuver is supposed to take place, which draws flesh over the starved bones, the flesh with skin, criss-crossed with arteries, which drink blood from the ground, the return home of the bowels out of nothingness, or is the angel hollow under the clothing, because the shrinking flesh-bank under the ground no longer yields any more bodies, an EVIL FINGER, which is held by the dead in the wind against the police of the heavens, pioneer and BRIDE OF THE WIND, which wards off the wind of the natural enemies of the resurrection in the flesh, which they inhabit, it blows like a storm into the trap, the arrow of the drapes points to the woman, the murderer too is perhaps only a dead person on duty, the annihilation of the birds his (secret) mission, the casual dance-step indicates the end of the labor is soon, perhaps the woman is already on the return journey into the earth, pregnant with storm, the seed of the rebirth out of the explosion of legs, bones and splinters and marrow, the supply of wind marks the distance of the parts, out of which perhaps, if the earthquake explodes them through the skin of the planet after the relocation of breathable air the earthquake, THE WHOLE composes itself, the copulation of the star through its dead ones, the first signal the clouds with the wire frame, which in truth consists of nerves, which precede the bones, that is to say out of the fine-spun web of bone-marrow, like the weaving without visible roots, which creaks towards the bungalow and has already occupied the inner rooms up to the ceiling, or the wire tangle of the chairs, or the net, which nails the sweep of the mountains to the ground, or everything is different, the steel net the offhand flourish of a casual crayon, which denies the mountains physical form with a sloppily conducted hatchwork, perhaps the caprice of the composition follows a plan, is the tree standing on a tray, the roots cut off, are the other trees in the background especially long-stemmed mushrooms, products of a climatic zone, which does not have trees, how did the cement-block get into the landscape, no trace of transport or vehicle, I TOLD YOU YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME BACK DEAD IS DEAD, no skid mark, summoned out of thin air, fallen from the SKY, or lowered out of air breathable only by the dead with a crane, which moves at a fixed point in the SKY named over-there [Darueber: "hin und drueber" was a common reference to the other half of Germany during the Cold War, used by East and West Germans alike], is the sweep of the mountains a museum piece, on loan from an underground exhibition room, in which the mountains are preserved, because in their natural place they hinder low-flying angels, the picture an experimental arrangement, the roughness of the design an expression of the contempt for the guinea pigs man, bird, woman, the blood-pump of daily murder, man against bird and woman, woman against bird and man, bird against woman and man, providing the planet with fuel, blood the ink, which describes its paper life in color, even its sky threatened with anemia by the resurrection of the flesh, sought after: the gaps in the procession, the other in the return of the same, the stutter in the speechless text, the hole in eternity, the possibly redeeming MISTAKE: distracted gaze of the murderer, when he tests the neck of the victim on the chair with the hands, with the blade of the knife, on the bird in the tree, into the void of the landscape, hesitation before the cut, eyes closed before the spray of blood, laughter of the woman, which for one glimpse long loosens the stranglehold, making the hand with the knife tremble, sheer fall of the bird, lured by the gleam of the blade, landing on the skull of the man, two beak-

jabs right and left, reeling and howling of the blinded one, blood spraying in the whirlwind of the storm, which seeks the woman, fear, that the mistake occurred during the blinking of the eyes, the observation slit into time opens between glance and glance, hope dwells on the edge of a quickly rotating knife, with increasing attentiveness to the point of exhaustion, lightning-like insecurity in the certainty of what horrifies: the MURDER is an exchange of genders, ALIEN IN ONE'S OWN BODY, the knife is the wound, the neck the axe, is the fallible supervision part of a plan, to which device is the lens fastened, which sucks the color from the gaze, across which eye-socket is the retina stretched, who OR WHAT asks about the picture, LIVING IN THE MIRROR [Spiegel: literally mirror, but also the name of the leading German magazine], is the man with the dance-step I [ICH: capitalized in original], his face my grave, I [ICH] the woman with the neck wound, right and left in the hands the divided bird, blood in the mouth, I [ICH] the bird, which shows the murderer the way into the night with the writing of its beak, I [ICH] the frozen storm.

[1985]

Translator's notes: Mueller delivered the following speech upon receiving the Buechner Prize in Darmstadt 1985.

WOYZECK'S WOUND

For Nelson Mandela

1

Woyzeck is still shaving his captain, eating his proscribed peas, tormenting his Marie with the dullness of his love, his population turned into a state, surrounded by ghosts: the Fusilier Runge is his bloody brother, proletarian tool of Rosa Luxemburg's murderers; his prison is called Stalingrad, where his victim faces him in the mask of Kriemhild; her memorial stands on Mamaia Hill, her German monument, the Wall, in Berlin, the tank-convoy of the revolution, curdled into politics. HIS MOUTH PRESSED TO THE SHOULDER OF THE OFFICER, WHO LIGHT-FOOTEDLY LED HIM HENCE, is how Kafka saw him disappear from the stage, after the fratricide WITH EFFORT BITING BACK HIS UTMOST VOMIT. Or as the patient, which puts the doctor to bed, with the wound open like a pit mine, out of which the maggots coil. Goya's giant was his first appearance, who sat in the mountains counting the hours of domination, father of the guerilla. On a mural in a cloister-cell in Parma I've seen his severed feet, enormous in an Arcadian landscape. Somewhere his body keeps swinging along perhaps by the hands, perhaps shaking with laughter, into an unknown future, which is perhaps his crossbreeding with the machine, driven against gravity in the roar of the rocket. In Africa he's still on his crusade into history, time no longer works for him, his hunger too is perhaps no longer a revolutionary element, since it can be stilled with bombs, while the drum-majors of the world devastate the planet, battlefield of tourism, emergency runway,

no glance at the fire, which the infantry soldier Franz Johann Christoph Woyzeck saw in the sky over Darmstadt while whittling sticks for the running of the gauntlet. Ulrike Meinhof, daughter of Prussia and latterday bride of another foundling of German literature, who buried himself on the Wannsee, protagonist of the last drama of the bourgeois world, the armed RETURN OF THE YOUNG COMRADE OUT OF THE LIMESTONE QUARRY, is his sister with the bloody necklace of Marie.

2

A text bruised many times by the theater, which happened to a twenty-three-year-old, who had the eyelids at birth cut away by the Fates, dynamited by fever into orthography, a structure like one originating during fortune-telling on New Year's [Bleigiessen: "pouring of lead", New Year's ritual where fortunes are told by pouring hot lead into cold water], when the hand trembles with the spoon before the look into the future, blocking the entrance into Paradise like some sleepless angel, in which the innocence of writing plays found its home. How harmless the baby bust [Pillenknicke: "pill-crease", idiomatic term for the fall in birth-rate due to the pill] of recent drama, Becketts WAITING FOR GODOT, before this quick thunderstorm, which arrives with the speed of another time, Lenz packed in the baggage, the quenched lightning-bolt from Livonia, the era of Georg Heym, in the space without a utopia under the ice of the Havel, Konrad Bayer in the disemboweled skull of Vitus Bering, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann in the right-hand turn before SHAKESPEARE'S PUB, how shameless the lie of POSTHISTOIRE [French: post-history] before the barbaric reality of our prehistory.

3

THE HEINE-WOUND begins to scar over, crookedly; WOYZECK is the open wound. Woyzeck lives where the dog is buried [idiomatic term meaning, there's the fly in the ointment, there's the rub], the dog is named Woyzeck. We await his resurrection with fear and/or hope, that the dog returns as a wolf. The wolf comes from the south. When the sun stands at its zenith, it is one with our shadow, history, in the hour of sunburst, begins. Not until history has happened is the common downfall into the frost of entropy worthwhile, or, abbreviated by politics, in the atomic flash, which will be the end of utopias and the beginning of a future beyond humanity.

[1987]

Translator's notes: This is the introduction to Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome, Mueller's last completed play.

UNITY OF THE TEXT: Commentary, as a means of bringing the reality of the author into play, is drama, not description and should not be delegated to a story-teller. It can be recited by a chorus; by the actor in relation to the figure in question; by the actor in relation to another figure, who stands in this or that or no relation at all to the figure in question. The expression of emotions can, as in Japanese theater, be undertaken by a

commentator (speaker or chorus); the report of the proceedings they set in motion, by the actor. The repertory of roles (positions) which the commentary makes available (audience voyeur overseer reporter introductory speaker stage-whisperer whip-master sparring-partner wailing-woman [woman paid to wail at funerals] shadow doppelganger ghost) is open to everyone participating in the play. Every actor can be immune to/subjugated by the emotions which the text articulates/silences. No monopoly on roles masks gestures texts, epification no privilege; to each the chance to alienate themselves. Titus Commentary throws the dice with accidental materials, the field of action is provisional, the coordinates are fear and geometry. (The emergency begins, when the coordinates explode the horrors of the day). The theatrication of reality through politics as dependence on technology throws the theater back into its reality, whose tempo is the stoppered [gebremste: braked] explosion. The cancerous course of life in capital or alternately its coexistence with it on the same underground-honeycombed planet (it flies into superficiality, in the underground chambers grows death) tears the binding of the actors to the/their private property: they no longer play a role. Expropriation = emancipation of the actor as the condition of theater's survival. The body the compass-needle: the gesture dispenses with its functions (blood-pressure temperature) in the unknown landscape, which is perhaps a landscape beyond death or a place on the fringe. The text the knife, which loosens the tongues of the dead on the test-bed of anatomy; theater writes road-signs in the blood-swamps of the ideas. If the commentator is given the role of the leader of the dead, the learning-process of the dead must be shown, death as a task, DISMEMBER REMEMBER [in English], a lesson which must be learnt, training in the resurrection (be it out of the forest of pages against the idiots of critique). In the belly of tragedy lurks farce, a virus from the future. When the larva emerges, blood flows instead of sawdust. Death as embryo (Ibsen's tidings). Or reversed: God is the zombie, which brings the messiah to the world, his death the condition of the birth. Monuments can be employed as demonstrations of amputations and deaths, larger or smaller than life-size, on which the level of devastation is noted. Fodder for the new animal, which populates the audience-hall, in the process of superseding humanity, or information for visitors from outer space, a message in a bottle for more fortunate galaxies. Theater as midwife of archeology: the relevance of art for today is tomorrow.

[1988]

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

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]

[1989]

Translator's note: Heiner Mueller gave the following brief address at the rally in 1989 which marked the revolution against the one-party state in the GDR; rather than haranguing the crowd, he read an appeal from a group of independent trade unions. After he was done, the crowd boomed lustily, dismissing any talk of class struggle as Communist propaganda. Five years of ruthless neoliberalism and twenty percent unemployment would soon show Heiner and the trade union activists were on the mark after all.

One of the results of the GDR's political system has been the separation of artists from the population through privileges. We need solidarity instead of privileges. I'd like to read the call for an initiative for independent unions:

“Friends [Kolleginnen und Kollegen], what has the FDGB done for us in 40 years? Has it pressed the question of reducing working hours to the directors of firms? Why hasn't it fought for the 40-hour-week with us? Has it even attempted to ensure that our wages keep pace with the rise in inflation? Why aren't there negotiations to increase wages? Where does the FDGB stand when it comes to the new quotas being introduced in our firms? On our side? Do they hold up the norms, when it becomes clear that we should also be paid correspondingly? How can the FDGB in good conscience claim to represent our interests when we have 10 days fewer days of vacation on average than our Western colleagues? Has the FDGB come out for the lowering of the retirement age? Have we ever seen the union leadership refuse to accept the state plan in our interest? Have we yet ever experienced a moment when the union gets something done for us, even if it's against the wishes of the Party and the state? Forty years without our own organization are enough. We must not allow ourselves to be organized, not even by new men and women. We must organize ourselves. The next few years won't be a picnic for us. They're going to tighten the thumbscrews on us. Prices will rise and wages will stagnate. When subsidies are swept away, that will affect us most of all. The Government demands performance. Soon it will threaten us with unemployment. We're the ones who are supposed to set things aright. If the living standards of most of us are not to be lowered, we need our own representatives. Found independent unions.”

May I add one personal note: if the Government finally collapses by next week, dancing will be permitted at demonstrations.

[1990]

Germany placeless. Remarks on Kleist.

Speech given at the reception of the Kleist-Prize.

I beg pardon in advance for the fact that I will not say much about Kleist today. Too many contemporary events keep me from doing so: mourning for what is past, rage over what was omitted, affects, which from the (prevailing) standpoint of the economy are a luxury, but we live/work for luxury, the curiosity for what is coming. And my apologies if this becomes a monologue, I have more questions than answers and no time for polemics. A time-wall has fallen, and all of us stand so to speak overnight in a room with unknown dimensions, rather like the situation of someone who is blind, who makes the discovery at a busy intersection that their guide-dog no longer sees, or, if you will, like Carl Schmitt's notorious-infamous dog on the highway, in any case in a Kleistian situation. The figure of the ghost-driver [Geisterfahrer: also wrong-way driver] belongs to the highway. An uncanny sentence from Brecht's *Fatzer*-fragment, which I can't get out

of my head these days: JUST AS GHOSTS CAME BEFORE OUT OF THE PAST / SO NOW LIKEWISE OUT OF THE FUTURE.

For the Rheinlander Adenauer the Elbe was an Asiatic border-river. The cold shower during the crossing of an Elbe bridge going east determined his politics, which handed over the hammer to the Saxon Ulbricht, with which he could nail East and Central Germany to the cross of Stalinism, or, less pathetically and closer to the truth, which gave the prisoners of Stalin the possibility, of holding the population of the colony GDR [German Democratic Republic, formal name for East Germany] (named OUR HUMAN BEINGS) in the imagined holding-pattern of REAL EXISTING SOCIALISM, a word-monstrosity, Walter Benjamin's picture of Stalinism, in one of his futile Svendborger conversations with Brecht, as the SURFACING OF A HORNED FISH OUT OF THE OCEAN DEEP is more exact. The result was the fatal delay of German unity, the tempo of the final sprint underscores the fatality, because it puts repression once more in the place of experience and the push towards emancipation is caught in a new, economically dominated holding-pattern. The Prussia of Heinrich von Kleist is an earthquake zone, threatened by fault-lines, dwelling in the cleft between West and East Rome, Rome and Byzantine, which wends in irregular curves throughout Europe, visible in lightning-flashes, when after the loss of a binding religion or ideology the old tribal fires are rekindled anew. A cleft, into which Poland for example has always disappeared again.

The Prussian alliance with Russia against Napoleon was in the light of later history a decision against Europe. The all too late attempt (history always happens for Germans at the wrong time, too late or too early) in 1848 to set foot in Europe, ended logically in the national and class compromise of the German military machine according to the HOMBURG-model IN THE DUST WITH ALL THE ENEMIES OF BRANDENBURG and two world wars. The sentence of the young Marx THE GERMANS ALWAYS EXPERIENCE FREEDOM ON THE DAY OF ITS BURIAL already applied for the so-called wars of liberation against Napoleon, the last figure of a European central-perspective. Kleist, against all familial or patriotic inhibitions, knew it in Guiscard, the fragment of a tragedy and the tragedy of a fragment. Afterwards absolute painting began with Goya, which was a reflex of the transformation of the globe into a map, emigration/exile out of time into space, according to the Kleist-model of the Marionette theater, experienced by Nietzsche as the death of God, by Marx at an almost contemporaneous moment as the possibility of the birth of human beings beyond the economy, in truth the first step, which perhaps, if one starts out from the increasing uninhabitability of the planet, is a step forwards, towards the sublation of human beings in space-time, in the marriage of human being and machine.

A digression on Kleist: during the reading of his letters the feeling, not without horror, of an enormous distance, of a distance also to his own texts, his own labor, which is not addressed to persons, not to a public, Goethe's reproach, not to a market. Kafka, the first Bolshevist author, has formulated the distance. WRITTEN KISSES ARE IMBIBED BY THE GHOSTS. It is not only a question of anonymous spy-agencies or the censorship of letters. The era of letters and of diaries as the expression of sensations ends with electronics, everyone their own stool-pigeon, art is the last autonomy, perhaps the last

realm of what is humane, works of art are at most letters to unknown addresses, if need be from other galaxies. Another citation from Brecht's *Fatzer*-material, written in the expectation of Hitler and Stalin, Auschwitz and the gulag: WE HOWEVER / INTEND TO SIT / AT THE EDGE OF CITIES / WAITING / FOR THE NEW ANIMAL / WHICH IS BEING BORN / TO TRIGGER / HUMAN BEINGS. The new animal writes no letters, except for the telefax, which dissolves the person. As a result of his observation of the failed German attempt of 1848, to catch up with the French Revolution, which took place in Germany only in literature, as sublimation, the Spanish diplomat Donoso Cortez, not free of racism, saw the main danger for Europe in the coming alliance of the Slavic world and socialism. This alliance was, from a different perspective, out of the insight into the molding of Russian politics through Tataric invasion, the nightmare of Karl Marx. The nightmare realized itself in REAL EXISTING SOCIALISM. The contemporary return of the same: in the GDR the Soviet occupation prevented the civil war, which would have been the condition of a true revolution, that is to say, substituted for it through bureaucratic terror; the Federal Republic [of Germany: the FRG was the formal name for Western Germany], out of the natural interest in the preservation of its own fragile conservative structure, nipped the second possible revolution in the bud with the softer economic stranglehold of the market economy. The bill for putting off class-struggle is the recoil into the atavism of race-struggles, which will long continue to occupy us.

After the flight of departure into history out of the greed of the dramatist for catastrophes, which perhaps, as the psychoanalysts maintain, come from a distorted relationship to life, but who could live undisturbed, in view of the daily catastrophes, except an idiot or a saint, again back to the very disturbed Kleist, for whom the fragile institution of the world was the condition of his existence as an author and ultimately the grounds for dissolving himself as a person. His fundamental metaphor, in the forcefield between Europe and Asia, is the pillar of dust, the trope of total acceleration at a standstill, the eye of the typhoon. The Mongol onslaught was a fundamental European experience, refreshed in the East by the Soviet occupation, still and anon a memory, beyond the confidence of the senile Hindenburg, when the great brakesman of the Russian steam-roller at Tannenberg promoted Hitler, as his chosen son, into power. Even the definition of Meister Eckhardt GOD IS THE WASTELAND seems inspired by the dream of the break-in of the ridden steppe into the world of established German manufactures: God is the Other, death comes from Asia. The grave of Genghis Khan is undiscoverable: the Mongols had the habit of riding at length over the graves of their leaders, until they were indistinguishable from plowed earth.

From the viewpoint of the stutterer Kleist: from the gradual preparation of thoughts during speaking to the gradual preparation of silence during speaking. In 1961 the pillar of dust turned into concrete, corrective against the whirlwind of the continents. After its fall Europe stands unsheltered, exposed to the four winds. PENTHISILEA is an African play, far beyond Hoelderlin's orientalist Sophocles-interpretation, the elephants are no ornament, they are the elephants, which Hannibal led over the Alps against Rome. A sentence from Brecht on Hannibal: SOMEHOW HE JUST WASN'T INTERESTED IN CARTHAGE. The detour is the drama, the orchestra the music. Kleist, in relation to

Goethe, the European and master of equilibrium, and Schiller, the German, who was a transplanted politician, stands sharply at odds in relation to everything. At odds with his material: Schroffenstein a crudity after Shakespeare, Kaethschen a colportage from the Middle Ages, The Broken Jug a fortunate accident, the result of a bet, Homburg an army report read against the grain. The problem, which becomes manifest in the lonely Kleist, is called Germany, the figure of his longing was Napoleon/Guiscard. Shakespeare had the Wars of the Roses, Goethe had to invent Goetz, Schiller Wallenstein. The representatives of particular interests inflated into national figures, because there was no German history. Lessing, the fortunate-unfortunate predecessor, had, against the resistance of the Prussian province, where the Second Frederick played war, while France and England divided up the world, his sights set at Europe. Leisewitz recounts, that Lessing told him, he never dreamed. Thus could he stand Germany, which was always only a dream, no place, a flight, no homeland, a beyond, which always again sought to legitimate itself out of its dead, ultimately a realm of the dead. The desperate search for a national material winds like a thread through the history of German dramatic literature. Example HERMANN'S BATTLE: a relatively inconsequential border-incident in the Roman Empire as national mythos, in Kleist the drama of the guerilla. He deals with his material like a sexual offender with a woman, in PENTHESILEA he changes roles, genders, in HOMBURG, which circumscribes the history of Frederick the Great in a dream of Prussia, he comes to rest. Goethe did not look favorably on the transformations, which he considered necessary for the formation of a German national literature. Kleist would have been curious at the coming Germany. It will not be only European.