

*Postmodernizing Shakespeare:
From Hamlet to Hamletmachine.*

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Granted the literary status that Shakespeare's canonical tragedy, *Hamlet*, has acquired as a "grand-narrative", Muller's postmodern *Hamletmachine*(1977), then "wage[s] war on totality ... " (Lyotard qtd.in Swingewood 1998, 160), on the Bard's attempt to totalize history through a metanarrative ... "rooted in a nostalgic yearning for organic unity, wholeness [and] harmony ... " (160). Assigned a mission of revenge in order to bring Denmark back to order, wholeness and harmony, so that history and the legacy of the late King Hamlet may be finalized into a closure, Hamlet falters in the process as he gets enmeshed in melancholic philosophizing. Muller's *Hamletmachine* deconstructs this attempt on the basis that "there is no collective, universal subject" (160) which can successfully seek emancipation since "the concept of the 'whole' is totalitarian, terroristic ..." (160) and imperialistic, creating an ambiguous and indeterminate state of "... pluralism and difference ..." (161); namely an incredulous version of the Shakespearean tragedy.

Rejecting Shakespeare's mode of "representation, objective meaning and truth ..." (160) as a high-culture text that is authentic, Muller decanonizes and dehistoricizes *Hamlet* through discontinuous, temporal disorder reflecting the terminal stage of Western

civilization, reducing it in the form of a shapeless, fragmented, decadent and doomed 20thC.Europe of rootless, alienated, dislocated personae, whose only relief is death. Muller's text is "emptied of historical meaning, structured in the norms of immediacy and celebratory of commodity fetishism"(170). As such it distorts *Hamlet*, destabilizing and denaturalizing its tradition and convention, ironizing its historical grounding and undermining its form, disrupting the past and corrupting the present. Thus, Muller retextualizes the past within postmodern parameters through a narrative without linearity or individual human experience. Hence, in Muller, "the postmodern self-consciously 'replays' images of a past that cannot be known but that can only be constructed and reconstructed through a play of entirely contemporary references to the *idea* of the past" (kaye 1997, 20). Muller takes a cataclysmic position of History, Culture and Society, as ideologically totalizing and homogenizing principles. His anarchic anti-form, anti-narrative, disintegrates the whole and "celebrates the ultimate collapse of differentiating principles" (Swingewood 1998, 166), annihilating "the 'great divide' between high and popular culture" (Huysen as qtd. in Swingewood 1998, 166). It "denies itself the solace of good

forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable" (Lyotard as qtd.in Swingewood 1998, 161). By recycling Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through pastiche, mimicking and randomly cannibalizing the styles of the past, stressing *difference*, Muller installs and subverts the classical through irony, parody and contradiction, abusing and undermining patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism and humanism.

Considering the power Hamlet wields as a cultural icon and the central figure of the literary Western canon of tragedy, Muller's postmodern anti-hero exists in the instantaneous empty present as a "multiplex self-critique of the 20thC. ... intellectual in the guise of Shakespeare's" tragic hero (Barranger 1998, 706), posing as actor first, then alternating roles as Macbeth, soldier, prisoner, terrorist, revolutionist, and data processor, demolishing all ideologies. This is achieved without reference to a specific contextual space, unlike Shakespeare who invokes 16thC. Denmark. Muller supplants the Shakespearean hero in an attempt to conquer the old, the ghost of the past and the "grand-narrative". He fabulates the Hamlet myth through depthlessness, bricolage, disconnection, as well as

contradictory and juxtaposed levels of reality. As such, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* "co-exists within the structure of [*Hamletmachine*] ... 'force-field' ... based on opposition" (Swingewood 1998, 169) and an "affirmation/ denial binarism realized syntactically, formally, linguistically and dramatically..." (Green et al. 1997, 219). Experimenting with form, content and representation, Muller's hybridization of genres is manifest in his parody of the tragedy and in Hamlet's own multiplicity of roles and selves.

Though Muller's main aim is to liberate himself and his text from Shakespeare's authority, he only proves that by reinscribing the old systems, he is aesthetically and metaphysically entrapped, and the possibility of existing outside history and culture is impossible because their very structures cannot be dismantled since they sustain the very opposition and difference on which the postmodern is figured.

In his attempt to deconstruct Western intellectual literary history and text, Muller makes a jumble of allusions that refer to disparate historical and ideological figures. Based on this assumption, *Hamletmachine* may be regarded as a 'hyperreal'¹ simulacra² because his Europe does not refer to anything Real ,but rather, to a 'semiurgic

society'³ in which "the Real is assimilated to the image" through signs that no longer refer to an external, objective reality but have become reality itself (Baudrillard as qtd.in Swingewood 1981, 171). Muller's liquidation of all referentials to the Real, and his artificial resurrection of them into signs, images and fragments that make up Hamlet's world, shows his inability to retain the past and his skepticism of an authoritative singular narrative. He celebrates fragmentation and incoherence as he creates a virtual reality of Europe, a copy, a 'simulacra', a realm of signifiers without signifieds.

Muller presents "two types of experience ... [that] are ... contradictory" [and same] within the same framework[:] ... unity and rupture, indeterminacy and immanence" (Barranger 1998, 704). He juxtaposes disparate theatrical styles from the long monologue, to pantomime, dance, satire, elegiac interludes, surrealistic dreams, visual metaphor, cryptic stage directions, blank verse, prose, on and off stage speeches, direct quotes from Shakespeare, Beckett, Holderlin, Eliot, Cummings, Marx, Benjamin, Sartre, Andy Warhol, the Bible and Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty; a theatrical heteroglossia.

The five imagistic fragment-structures that parallel Shakespeare's five acts, are composed of five monologues

spoken by actors who "discourse on the old *Hamlet* story, comment on their ancient and modern roles ... [in] a language that is an ironic echo of the original" (Barranger 1998, 706), to underscore and undermine them. These sections overlap in plots and monologues that are in the form of recurring lines of "verbatism" in shifting contexts and different versions of the same action" (Jameson 1991, 105). As a "variant of the Hamlet theme in a Communist country after Stalin's death, [the text] is a quotation within a quotation; a form of doubling" (Barranger 1998, 706) as "... Muller's human fragments repeat not only their literary theatrical history but their contemporary context ... " (Barranger 1998, 705) as well. Through a pattern of displacement and reinstatement, the characters are "delineated through lines of dialogue drawn from different historical eras and genres ..." (Fuchs 1996, 105), giving an inconsistent and uncertain sense of identity. Far from being individual subjects, they are bits and pieces of others, creating a crisis in identity as they struggle within "... the complex interaction between art and its socio-political context..." (Barnett 1990, 190).

Hamletmachine presents a challenge between "text and performance, characters and bodies, dialogue and voices" (Walsh 2001, 24). This conflict can only be

resolved by making the play exist in performance since it lacks a formal script and its staging foregrounds performativity and self-reflexivity. In addition, the play functions by "an awareness of the event of narrativity; the contingent aspect of narrative that is so completely *other* to discourse that it cannot be incorporated, accounted for or 'totalized' by it. Here the 'postmodern' [text], indicates a moment of struggle between narratives ... " (Kaye 1994, 18), especially, as it exists as a piece in which "no single instance of narrative can exert a claim to dominate narratives by standing beyond it;" (Readings 1991, 69) and "where the 'grand-narrative' is given over to the 'little narrative' and the telling of *the* story is displaced by the telling of *a* story that looks towards its own displacement" (Kaye 1994, 18-19). *Hamletmachine* therefore, becomes the 'little narrative' of *the* story; *a* story that displaces *Hamlet*. The forthcoming analysis of the play will elaborate this point further.

Section I, "Family Scrapbook", is an "appellation that emphasizes the text's concerns with kinship and memory, and the individual's confrontation with historical fragments that are arranged together but do not necessarily announce a coherent narrative" (Walsh 2001, 27). A human subject is born out of violence, as a

disembodied voice, without a specific speaker indicated, looking into an indeterminate apocalyptic future time, and back on an incomprehensible past of the ruins of Europe—the cemetery of western civilization, stating that "SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709). Hamlet, the intellectual in conflict with history, as an actor tells of Shakespeare's story of betrayal, murder and adultery, against a background of modern Europe. In addition, there is an implication that he has renounced family but will recount this "process of renunciation as if flipping through an album" (Kalb 1998, 52). He begins the play saying:

I was Hamlet.

I stood at the shore and talked with
the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe
in back of me.

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709)

This is "a gesture toward identification that simultaneously establishes historical topicality and distance. The speaker can place himself within the age-old fictional persona of Hamlet, but is living in the aftermath of WWII and the instantiation of Communist rule in East Germany" (Walsh 2001, 27). It also means that he is ready

to renounce his role from the beginning so that he may be independent from the old text, in order to be able to usurp power and control to destroy it. In confused, incomprehensible disjointed articulation, Hamlet goes on to describe his father's funeral procession, which he stops, then his opening of the casket and dispensation of the body to the populace. Such action signifies Hamlet's personal attempt to end his commitment to the past, which entitles the performance of an action of revenge in the present or future, in the form of a duty. Dispensing with his dead procreator is not only an aggressive insult to the past but also a physical abuse and hostile gesture towards the ghostly ancestor. In addition, it is Muller's postmodern version of handling the parental text through dismemberment, not only of the prime figure of late King Hamlet or his ghost or body, but also a dismemberment of the authorial text itself through narrative fragmentation and discontinuity. In an interview, Muller confessed that he had been obsessed with *Hamlet* for thirty years and his only way to overcome this was by destroying it, by writing his short text (Kalb 1998, 108) according to postmodern terms, through performance rather than theatricality. Thus *Hamletmachine* is a reshaping and reinvention of the past, challenging and reaffirming the original text by

making it postmodern. In its alienating methodology of self-awareness, and self-consciousness as a text, the work points to its own status as a meta-theatre. Thus, if Shakespeare is the cultural ghost of meta-narrative that determines theatrical tradition, then Muller's is the text in opposition and tension with History. *Hamlet* is the call from the past upon the postmodern condition and theatre, whose anti-Hamlet eschews the classical persona and defies the demand of the dead literary father(s) (Shakespeare and King Hamlet) on Muller. By undermining Shakespeare's tragedy, Muller dissolves, invalidates and evacuates the former's world of character, meaning and authenticity. Muller's empty signals disorient, creating incoherence, indifference and gruesome absurdity and Artaudian cruelty, to counteract any traditional quest for harmony and meaning. Hamlet's loathing of his father's murder reaches an extreme psychotic trauma as he feeds the corpse to the masses; a cannibalistic gesture that reverses his emotions from normal sympathy to unsympathetic avenge. His abusive verbal attacks go on to obscenely describe the widow's and the murderer's copulation over the casket, as he helps his uncle up and orders his mother to open her legs: "LET ME HELP YOU UP, UNCLE, OPEN YOUR LEGS,

MAMA" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709). The overlap between the family story and the state story produces abusive solipsistic rantings at ghosts and fractured selves. Funeral and marriage overlap and intermix in a grotesque image. Hamlet begs for a cause to grief, for real sorrow, which the death of his father does not offer, nor the marriage of his mother, except in a convoluted fashion which he prefers to deny and reverse. A reference to the overwrought contemplations of the Shakespearean hero is echoed by his postmodern counterpart saying:

**I'M LUGGING MY OVERWEIGHT BRAIN
LIKE A HUNCHBACK**

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709)

Then he becomes a second rate clown in "THE SPRING OF COMMUNISM"

(Muller's East Germany), who shifts back to Hamlet, announcing the ghost's presence in a tone of indifferent sarcasm: "Here comes the ghost who made me..."(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709), addressing it in an attempt to understand, saying:

What do you want of me?

Is one state-funeral not enough for you?

.....

What's your corpse to me?

.....

....., maybe you'll go to heaven. What

Are you waiting for?

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709)

Hamlet's harsh tone, devoid of sentimental allusion to or connection with the earlier work, reflects his annoyance of the ghost for appearing and demanding, reflecting a lack of dialogic interaction, unlike in Shakespeare. A Baudrillardian analysis could regard the ghost as a signified of hyper-reality, while the Real, namely the king, who is killed, as the phantom or a 'simulacra' of the Real. In this case, the sign would supercede the Real. Consequentially, Muller's Hamlet can be described as a simulation of the signified avenger of Shakespeare. Since the Real is lost, and with it authenticity, then what remains is the "precession of simulacra"⁴ (Swingewood 1998, 171): images and signs of: woman as frailty, man as murderer, and father as ghost. The ghost is a resurrection of the past and the father, therefore, of the Real, and also becoming one with the imaginary, fabricating a simulation that is both true and false. Hence, in Muller, his

postmodern system of signs makes up Hamlet's world, and replaces the Real which cannot be retained except in that form. It becomes a world with only signifiers and no signifieds, as all referentials are extinguished.

Defying and abolishing any attempt at temporal fixity, Muller's Hamlet says: "Tomorrow morning has been cancelled" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 709), effacing any linear progression not only of narrative, but also of future conceptual time. Since neither the past nor present are a solace, Muller creates a "countertemps" (Connor 1996, 77) to problematize History's rational record of factual events where "time is out of step with itself, the past and the future being made present to us in simulation, the present deferred and distributed into other times ... " (Connor 1996, 77) that uproot and adrift the characters. Thus, Hamlet confronts the absent in a monologic rant of self-loathing confusion. "Straddling [both] past and present [means] straddling two moments in aesthetic development" (Richardson 2006, 92); the ancestral and the postmodern. The present of Muller denies any future; it is a state of atemporality that fixes the personas in its grasp. What he presents is a single spatial perspective of reduction, encapsulating the history of Europe in a single day. Inherent is a nostalgic yearning to

relive a time when heroic roles were defined and predicted. Thus "... the 'I' has trouble breaking free from a paternal heritage that supports a violent status-quo socio-political structure. Hamlet's father generally represents history seen as drama, history viewed as coercive because it organizes events teleologically like a dramatic script. (Indeed, the father and uncle are eventually fused as "Claudius/Hamlet's father, rendering the question of legitimacy irrelevant)" (Kalb 1998, 53).

In a Pirandellian technique, Hamlet foregrounds his play-acting to Horatio, commenting on the latter's role and relationship to him, saying:

I knew you're an actor. I am too, I'm playing Hamlet.

Denmark is a prison; a wall is growing between us.

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710)

This self-conscious stand, through a stream-of-consciousness monologue, further intermixes contexts of betrayal and corruption in loosely tied stage pictures, when he addresses his mother saying:

Have you forgotten your lines Mama. I'll prompt you.

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710)

Incest and rape are described by Hamlet in severe and grotesque visual descriptions that shift between 'mother' and 'bride' images, all within a feminine framework. "Breasts", "womb", "virgin mother", "blood wedding", "bridal veil", "embrace", "wedding dress", "lips", "whore" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710) have alternating connotations between purity and impurity, love and lust, that decry Hamlet's opinion of women, which concludes with his desire to "eat" Ophelia's heart. Not only is such cannibalistic phrasing enough for Hamlet, but he will also "cram the corpse [of his mother] down the latrine so the palace will choke in royal shit" (Muller *Hamletmachine* 710). Both family and state are ruined due to the desires of the flesh, making Hamlet at war with History and Desire (father and mother), forcing him to make a violent confrontation with both. This spectacle of carnal and bloody unnatural acts ends Section I on a brutal note of ecological ruin.

In Section II, "The Europe of Women", females are desired and violated as fragmented objects through Ophelia's status as a corporalized sacrificial object and eternal victim. She asserts her identity as "I am Ophelia" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710) and has potential for revolutionary political action. She is suicidal prisoner,

heartless terrorist whose clock for a heart signifies timelessness and heartlessness. She becomes 'collective woman': all daughters, lovers, mass murderers, whores and revolutionists. In contrast, in Shakespeare, she exists in a set time frame as a tragically romantic maiden. Again Ophelia is depicted within a feminine context that is undermined as follows:

I'm alone with my breasts my thighs my womb.

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710)

In a desire to overcome her oppressed status as a victim of patriarchy, she becomes destructive:

I smash the tools of my captivity, the chair the table the bed.

I destroy the battlefield that was my home.

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 710)

The domestic field where she was held captive as daughter, wife or beloved, is destroyed as she frees herself from feminine imprisonment. She also destroys the photos of her captors and male lovers, as well as the tools of her captivity; suggesting "that iconography, representation itself, is under attack as much as any male or author principle" (Kalb 1998, 56). She sets fire to the set of her prison, wrenches her clock, and goes out into the street in

an uprising, clothed in her own blood. The extraction of the clock is "a critique of time—time as a 'frame' for reality, time seen teleologically as an agent of change and redemption that never arrive..." (Kalb1998, 57). Nonetheless, Ophelia remains an indeterminate split persona created through "... a series of identifications with women silenced through what appear to be acts of self-violence ..." (Walsh 2001, 31) that emphasize gender, biological and anatomical qualities. These function as the only identifiable criteria that can lend them an identity, but unfortunately through sexuality. Posing as patriarchal, feminine commodities for father, brother or lover, parallels the Shakespearean chaste and typically idealistic image of the female who is to be exchanged with the prince. Horrified by her being an accomplice to her father, Hamlet is repulsed by all forms of femininity as they fall under the power of lust. However, Muller gives Ophelia a voice to defend herself against accusations and to "speak back to everyone who is preoccupied with her body and her potential desire" (Walsh 2001, 31). She thus, becomes violently active and destructive, refusing to be appropriated with feminine ideologies such as procreation and copulation.

In Section III, "SCHERZO", a revolution occurs in the University of the Dead Philosophers, who throw their books at Hamlet from their gravestones, signifying the death of Western thought as well as a revolt against the tragic hero and his author. At the same time Ophelia dressed for strip-tease as a whore, represents a state of victimized passivity and commodification. Hamlet's clothes are torn off his body by the suicidal women of Section II; an intended act of aggression targeting their male aggressor. They also come to be transformed from objectified females as in Section II, to active agencies. This grotesque female gallery within academia, reverses the power order, as "Hamlet ...envies the women their object status, having apparently become overburdened with his intense subjectivity ... [and] a new, matriarchal order of pictorial dominance is about to be born" (Kalb 1998, 58). His desire to be a woman signals a transfiguration of gender in drag form. Dressed in Ophelia's clothes, he changes his role and becomes a female subject in the stage action, in an attempt to contradict Shakespeare's characterization. In this fashion, he also becomes the victim of Ophelia's aggressiveness as power is transformed to her, becoming a mark of her subjectivity. She puts on his face the make-up of a whore and blows him a kiss as he

poses as a drag queen. Here the male is subverted, deformed and annihilated altogether, as Ophelia becomes the active 'subject' while Hamlet assumes a submissive feminine role as 'object'. This reversal of sexual binaries can be read as a revolution in political power relations as biological gender is questioned and as sexual identities shuffle and are exchanged. However, though the two exchange garments and roles, this does not free them as characters from the binary logic of their drama, which means that it is only a make-over of a drag show complimentary to the one of striptease.

"Scherzo" is a theatrical allegory of Marxist revolutionary ideology, of Hamlet as the intellectual Marxist artist in crisis in 1977 East Germany, or even of Muller himself. The triumph of the oppressed, namely, the proletariat and women, is achieved in this section. Hamlet's desire to be a woman signifies an ambiguity in gender roles that leads to the substitution of power. Paradoxically, the drag queen, Hamlet, gains authority through the gender transfiguration. When Horatio embraces him in a feminine pose, this, could mean, that all males desire the feminine position even though, at some point, they would ultimately desire liberation. Moreover, it is also a reversal of the dialectic of 'subject' and 'object',

aggressor and victim, while the actual binary logic of the dialectic itself remains in place. Such is the structure of domination and submission, as well as the pattern of revolution and counter-revolution. At the same time, the final image of the female acrobat with breast cancer radiating like a sun, is a deformation of the most poignant female symbol. This super powerful, all enveloping image sums the Ophelia collage of imagery. In this section, Muller underscores gender as a cultural and social pretext in the context of the decline of western civilization and thought.

Section IV "Pest in Buda/ Battle for Greenland" is an anagram for Budapest and the failed Hungarian Revolt of 1956. It takes place in "*Space 2, as destroyed by Ophelia*" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711) as she puts into violent action what she says, by confronting the suit of armor; symbol of the ghost of the past. In contrast, in Shakespeare, her frustrations over her brother's absence, her father's murder and Hamlet's inexplicable behavior, drive her mad and suicidal. In *Hamletmachine*, she externalizes this into violence. After making indirect references to the Russian revolution throughout a long monologue, Hamlet himself revolts against stage and theatre as he steps out of his role, removes his make-up

and costume, and becomes the actor not character. In this resignation of role and dramatic persona, he realizes that his words no longer signify anything, his drama ceases to happen and his thoughts become grotesquely bloody: "My thoughts suck the blood out of the images" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711). This expresses the conflict between the man and the artist within him. The alienating, distancing Pirandellian technique used here, objectifies Hamlet as he stands 'out' of character, escaping dramatic and gender scripts, abolishing the boundaries between theatre and reality; an artistic revolutionary act that dismantles the very structure of the play in order to be liberated from all binary logics. The actor playing Hamlet is a paralyzed 'subject', and narrator of his paralysis. If in Shakespeare, Hamlet had the choice of "to be or not to be", to act or not to act, to take revenge or not, then in Muller he has no choice whatsoever because the script is lost, and the prompter is rotting in his box, failing to give "stable referents or desirable models of action from which to derive a sense of self" (Walsh 2001, 29). His renunciation of his identifiable self is part of his denial of time, his cancellation of tomorrow morning and his belief that "My drama doesn't happen anymore" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711) and "My drama didn't happen: The

script has been lost" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 712). This is a confused temporality with no possibility of any linearity, but rather a suppression and deferment of history that ends in "an eternal present of nausea" (Walsh 2001, 29). Describing how "Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711), further distances the audience and Hamlet from the play. He too has lost interest and will not play any more. Unnoticed by him, stagehands place a refrigerator and three T.V.sets, symbolizing commodification and the media. This is a fracturing of stage and theatrical space, as the relationship between words and meaning, text and performance, actor and audience is abolished. "Accompanied by textual prompts indicating that stagehands are moving props in and out while he delivers his lines, participates in the play's self-awareness of itself as a textual construct [and] also goes well beyond a gesture at meta-theatricality" (Walsh 2001, 28). The T.V channels are without sound to signify the huge gap in time from the 16thC. to Muller's 1970s. The set presents a gigantic monument of "a man who made history, enlarged a hundred times" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711), representing corrupt authority. Muller's Hamlet, the Eastern European intellectual,

contemplates the possible moment for revolt. Since the man's name is "interchangeable, the hope has not been fulfilled" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711) which makes Hamlet realize: "My drama, if it would happen, would happen in the time of the uprising" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 711). The post-modern era is emphasized through a reference to traffic, working hours and the streets that belong to the pedestrians who become armed as they fight against the police, approaching the moment of revolution or civil revolt. This produces a split self in Hamlet as he says: "My place, if my drama would still happen, would be on both sides of the front, between frontlines, over and above them" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 712). This indeterminate, ambivalent position makes him both revolutionary and passive, becoming soldier, typewriter and data processor, and at the same time his own jailer: "I am my own prisoner" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 712). In this sense he fails to come into being as a 'subject'. When the upheaval takes place and "the monument is toppled into the dust" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713), the proletariat come to inhabit the nostrils and ear canals, the very creases of the stone monument. The stage directions describe a general sense of oozing nausea and slime, nothingness, poverty,

cowardice, stupidity and torture. Nausea is repeated to reflect the state of illness, inertia, as a sickened intellectual fails to act, decide or think; a passivity and powerlessness; an existentialist state that Hamlet realizes about himself and his world. Hamlet is here the intellectual attempting, but failing, to deal with a totalitarian state, to resist or even comply. The result is "a radically alienated subject who descends into fragmented inertia" (Walsh 2001, 34). Whereas Shakespeare's Hamlet was a threat to the power structure of his uncle, the king, Muller's Hamlet poses no threat to such powers that disgust him, because he cannot confront or even locate them. Instead, he "confronts a series of fractured memories and self-projections" (Walsh 2001, 34).

As a result of this sense of fragmentation, a shift occurs in the dramatic persona of Hamlet as he says: "I WAS MACBETH" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 712), signifying a total collapse in identity, and at the same time, an attempt to rescue the dissolution of the subject, by finding an alternative one, from the literary canon, for self-affirmation. The characters slip into each other's identities, lose their individuality, fail to be single subjects, and become a series of characters who struggle for articulation, in an attempt to make sense through

discourse. This struggle only stresses the inability of the subject to locate a stable sense of identity as a point of departure towards positive action. "The inability to maintain a one-to-one relation of actor to character, reveals the lack of a single subject" (Richardson 2006, 90) which Muller as authority is responsible for. To negate the idea of authorship and responsibility, Muller's photograph appears on stage, to reflect his own revolution against an authoritarian voice. Thus, mentally and physically exhausted, the actor playing Hamlet says: "I don't want to die anymore, I don't want to kill anymore" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713) then tears the author's photograph so that all play-acting and commodification may end. As a revolutionary gesture against both Shakespeare and Muller, it also relates political, artistic and intellectual disintegration as the character tries to liberate itself from the author and gain independence and subjectivity as in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The death of the author becomes a prerequisite for subjectivity and existence outside history, tradition and dramaturgy. Muller mocks himself and his authenticity through the disruption of his own photo. The play, then calls attention to itself as performance, pastiche and allusion; as a postmodern meta-theatre. However, as this long scenario

of rebellion proves futile, Hamlet resolves to be a machine, unfeeling and unthinking, so that he may escape existence all together. The T.V screens go black and blood oozes from the refrigerator as "[t]hree naked women: Marx, Lenin, Mao... speak simultaneously, each one in his own language, the text:

"THE MAIN POINT IS TO OVERTHROW ALL EXISTING CONDITIONS ..."

(Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713)

This is a direct call for revolution. In addition, the scene signifies a gender transfiguration as the humiliated and debased women are, infact, posing as men, and thus the male authorities are represented by women to subvert patriarchy by the feminine. Here the opposition between male and female, masculine and feminine, master and slave is clearly foregrounded.

In order to escape history, culture and art, Hamlet yearns to be a machine, free of personal memory, without father or mother, or heritage; to exist outside sexual, political and metaphysical binaries as a cyber-body, or a perfect and unaffected machine. Shakespeare's Hamlet contemplates suicide in order to end his fears, irrational desires and memories. But, in Muller, Hamlet's desire to

be inanimate means a return to the disembodied voice at the beginning of the play—a state which he had lost on entering history and culture. This is Muller's view of subjectivity (to be a machine) beyond language, theatrical representation and history. To be a machine is to be an animated machine, to escape history, and be defined by negativity and absence, and to overthrow all conditions.

Yet, the actor playing Hamlet, finally, returns to his old role claiming that he is "HAMLET THE DANE PRINCE ..." (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713), his only articulation of selfhood, as he puts on make-up and costume once again and speaks of the ghost and of Ophelia. He then steps into the armor, splits the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao with an axe; as a final act of revolt, violence and revenge against ideological leaders and power representatives and also against the three naked women. The stage directions read: *Snow. Ice Age*, reflecting a return to a prehistoric time or a freezing of history, art and culture, as a final reduction of the world. The battle for the "Greenland" of the title is lost because it is a territory eternally covered in snow in the Ice Age, where the "hope is petrified" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713) and never fulfilled, only frozen.

Section V "Fiercely Enduring Millenniums in the Fearful Armor" presents Ophelia in a wheelchair, motionless, as a model of passive femininity, physical immobilization and psychic paralysis, with the deep sea behind her and the debris of fish, dead bodies and limbs drifting by. This also implies that the deep sea involves silence and an end to history, with the idea of evolution, progress and change, as debris; a universal death of the world. There is no promise of a Greenland, a land "free of crypts and monuments" (Kirk 2006, 202). As she is mummified, from top to bottom in gauze, by two men in white smocks, Ophelia speaks as Electra, identifying with her ancient classical Greek tragic heroine. Thus, Muller "reinforces this heritage, this collection of texts and authors whose eternal nature may be changed, and which may exist for the contemporary artist only as material, but which cannot be denied" (Muller *The Battle*, 94). "In the heart of darkness" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713) signifying the innermost suppressed forces of the heart, Ophelia speaks in the name of all victims, voicing their common fate, addressing all capitalists of the world. As a victimized female, she rebels against submission and oppression by ejecting the sperm she has received and, like Lady Macbeth, turns the milk in her breasts to poison,

thus giving up her role as a recipient of the male seed for the purpose of regeneration, as well as motherhood. By giving up her patriarchy, by refusing to be appropriated with feminine ideology, by taking back "the world I gave birth to" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713) and choking it between her thighs, to kill it, and bury it in her womb, she annihilates progeny altogether and thus ends human race. She revels in hate, contempt, rebellion and death, celebrating the end of submission and oppression as she carries the butcher knife and becomes the executioner. Walking through "your bedrooms carrying butcher knives" (Muller *Hamletmachine*, 713) in order to make them know the truth, reflects female empowerment by the elements of the male and begins using his same means – execution.

Here, Ophelia becomes European terrorist, an active resistant, militant and rebel against any feminine inscription, signification or identification. She ends and renounces motherhood, nurture and femininity as they entitle a sexual act that in itself is a form of submission. As Lady Macbeth, she desires to be unsexed and demonic, and as Electra, she is vengeful of patriarchy and the family trajectory. It is because of the patriarchal, authoritative power structures and their systematic

procedures practiced on the female, that she revolts. Using the language and methodology of terrorism and threat, she places herself within patriarchal structures in order to eradicate them. Her violence becomes a "regressive response that provokes state [and patriarchal] sanctioned violence to restore order, initiating a perhaps endless cycle of violent transactions between rulers and the ruled in which a state's claim to the right of a monopoly on legitimate violence gains validation through the confused and irrational forms of resistance it produces--working as an ideological control to ensure that aggressive resistance is localized and criminalized" (Walsh 2001, 33). Within a feminist context, she appropriates their language, "becoming a threatening voice of defiant rage politiciz[ing] *Hamlet's* gender issues and forc[ing] us to confront the reality of symbolic and literal violence as a condition of tyranny" (Walsh 2001, 32).

Tension is created between her violent words and her immobilized state of restriction into her gendered role and status. "The language she employs makes her such a radically alienated and unsocialized subject ..." (Walsh 2001, 32). Though, she is transformed by social and political circumstances into a condition of hatred, rebellion and violence, the final scene asserts "a vision of

aborted resistance to tyranny" (Walsh 2001, 27); concluding that the female will always be empowered and subverted by the male. While "*Hamlet* is a play filled with misogyny and an abject fear of female voice and desire ..., *Hamletmachine* confronts and explores the troubled negotiations and contests with which female voice and desire are entangled" (Walsh 2001, 32). Yet the ending clearly marks the termination of all such contestations as Ophelia sits in the wheelchair in gauze from top to bottom, signifying that, in Muller also, she was eventually feared as a subject of femininity and therefore, had to be silenced.

The play presents Hamlet and Ophelia as destroyers and slayers, executioners and victims, reinscribing sexual and political binaries on behalf of the revolution. Both their contemplations when turned into action become bloody, violent and fatally destructive because as postmodern personas, they are faced with "a whirlwind of images, discourses and past texts, a maddening heap of meanings and pressures that exert a violent restraint over individuals, producing either nausea or futile and bloody resistance" (Walsh 2001, 34). In an attempt to disentangle himself from his past, Hamlet fails to have a prime signifier as he continues to deny his persona, saying: "I am not Hamlet", while Ophelia asserts hers in the present

tense: "I am Ophelia". "For the *Hamletmachine* speaker, identity and identification fracture at precisely the moment that politics, time and space impinge upon his attempts to identify with Hamlet" (Walsh 2001, 28). This means that the old social and literary scripts are inescapable and permanent aesthetics. As such, the end signifies the failure of political revolution, as well as the failure to escape gender roles and structures that sustain them. Hamlet and Ophelia are not liberated as they return to their aesthetic scripts from which they tried to escape. As a result, Hamlet's desire for "inanimateness is also a desire to return to the disembodied voice at the beginning of the drama, to a state of infinite potentiality and plenitude that is lost as soon as the voice enters history and temporality. At the instant it begins to speak ..., at the very moment the play begins, the voice becomes temporalized and necessarily appetitive" (Kirk 2006, 196).

There is a definite similarity between the Muller Hamlet and his postmodern play since "*Hamletmachine*, as a text, mirrors the situation of the character Hamlet [as it] can only yearn for and gesture toward, but never actually stage, the impossible and unrepresentable coming of a new subjectivity outside history, beyond language, beyond theatrical representation" (Kirk 2006, 196-197).

As such, Muller's text cannot exist without continuous reference and allusion to Shakespeare's. The only alternative, thus, becomes for Muller's postmodern machine to recycle *Hamlet* in order to create a revolutionary text that rebels against history, culture and literature. Therefore, Muller distorts and twists the old text through the following techniques: pastiche, collage, intertextuality, montage, defamiliarization , juxtaposition and coexistence of diverse elements and genres, language dissolution, deconstruction of dramatic form, structure and characterization, reference to everything from T.S Eliot to Coca-Cola, integration of heterogenous forces, fractured images, concrete metaphors, shifting boundaries, dislocation of imagery, violent sounds, role shifting, doubling of experience, multiple signals, merging different levels of discourse, binarism, and bricolage. By creating a performance of anarchy, rather than a set scripted play, to counter act traditional dramaturgy and to "challenge its status as a meaning producing mechanism, and in so doing demonstrate the potential of performance to revive and transform canonical texts" (Walsh 2001, 25), Muller decanonizes Shakespeare. He foregrounds performativity as a means of making a text real for immediate experience, reshaping it in order to

"displace and reinvent representational theatre as a space for political action" (Walsh 2001, 26). Since Muller is against interpretation, he advocates a misreading for the purpose of satirizing historical grounding, effacing significance and meaning. By using and abusing Shakespeare, alluding to him then de-naturalizing the natural, employing traditional form and undermining it, challenging fixed boundaries between genres and art forms, high art and mass media culture, transgressing convention, *Hamletmachine* becomes a discontinuous, dislocated, disrupted decentring, indeterminate, parody of anti-totalization, reducing tragedy to the "pathos" of the "mechanical and debased" as it reworks history (Hutcheon *A Poetics*, 5).

"The play turns back on itself ... suggesting that this particular drama, embedded as it is within the western dramaturgical tradition, has only recycled and therefore perpetuated an ancient and deeply flawed social script" (Kirk 2006, 195). Muller preserves and annuls the Shakespearean text, remakes the classic story, approaching it from a wholly novel perspective based on doubling. He "simultaneously challenges and reaffirms *Hamlet's* position as the Ur-text of modernity" (Walsh 2001, 26) as well as its "capacity to offer meaningful

answers. It has a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards its parent text and is at times as hostile to its ghostly ancestor as Hamlet is in awe of his. *Hamletmachine* is finally both an act of iconoclasm and idolatry" (Walsh 2001, 26). The cultural legacy of Shakespeare cannot be escaped as he haunts Muller's text, forcing the characters to the performance of the old script of theatrical history and culture. Paradoxically, "*Hamletmachine* affirms the need to revisit and engage with past texts and asserts that such engagements are a means of coping with the histories of the present that we continually write and revise" (Walsh 2001, 34). At the same time, since Muller believes that history and meta-narratives can no longer refer to anything Real, and that they are unattainable, he renounces theatrical dramaturgy, even though his play's structure is based on a series of overlapping and contradictory associations to *Hamlet*, which means an inevitable adherence to the classical grand-narrative. There is a "continual promulgation of a diversity of linguistic and aesthetic styles that are taken out of their historical context and presented as currently available" (Constable 2002, 48).

From another perspective, *Hamletmachine* may be regarded as a "historiographic" (Hutcheon *A Poetics* 1996,

5) meta-narrative as its "self- reflexive ... claim to historical events and personages", bears "a theoretical self-awareness of history and revolutions, and of fiction as human constructs" (Hutcheon *A Poetics*, 5). By ironically twisting the title of Shakespeare's tragedy, as well as its form and content, and by playing with temporality, tenses and voices, to double the perspective of his work, Muller concentrates on the decentred, the marginal and ex-centric, giving them priority as they deconstruct the Shakespearean work. Moreover, "[t]he sequentially ordered sections are equally disrupted by a particularly dense network of interconnections and intertexts, each enacting or performing as well as theorizing the paradoxes of continuity and disconnection, of totalizing interpretation and the impossibility of final meaning" (Hutcheon *A Poetics*, 14-15). Therefore, all contradictions are magnified. In an attempt to erase the significance of the Shakespearean historical context, Muller chooses to problematize its content, and delegitimize its authority, in order to weaken its power and also to dedifferentiate between centres and margins, past and postmodern, genders, personas, genres, and cultural levels, foregrounding the text's depthlessness. In addition, he creates character monologues from different historical

eras and genres, varying from prose to verse, in order to abolish any attempt at a consistent identity. Failing to be individual subjects, they end up as "patchworks of second hand language who use words that clearly belong to others, not to themselves, not even to the author who created them" (Jameson 1991, 105). As such they become "textual entities ... a collection of individual performed moments rather than products of a consistent, overall interpretation" (Jameson 1991, 105). Created as pastiche, they have no psychological consistency, and end up as disembodied fragmented voices.

Writing *Hamletmachine* from a collage of juxtaposed cultural texts, produces a hybrid of performance elements and styles which make the characters' "presence as real performers out-weigh their presence as fictional characters" (Jameson 1991, 109), thus postmodernizing Shakespeare to the maximum. To conclude, "... [if] Baudrillardian parody marks the annihilation of reality, Jameson's

pastiche marks the annihilation of temporality. [Thus], [i]t is the pervasive quality of the image that systematically destroys the possibility of reaching the real and the past." (Constable 2002, 49). Accordingly, *Hamletmachine* as a parody, annuls reality and as

pastiche, annuls temporality, which means an annulment of *Hamlet* as Real and of Shakespeare as History/Culture. Thus, its postmodern quality ultimately destroys the possible attempt to reach the Real, the Past and the Historic.

End Notes

- 1- This term is borrowed from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983). New York: Semiotext and *Simulacra and Simulations* (1994). Michigan: Michigan Univ. Press as well as from Richard Lane's "Simulation and the Hyperreal" in his book *Jean Baudrillard*. (2004). London: Routledge.
- 2- This term is borrowed from the title of Jean Baudrillard's article "The Order of Simulacra" (1976) and Richard Lane's article of N0.1 above.
- 3- This term is borrowed from Baudrillard's two articles: "The Order of Simulacra" and "The Precession of Simulacra".
- 4- This term is borrowed from the title of Jean Baudrillard's article "The Precession of Simulacra" (1981).

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