



The Land of Green Plums

Herta Müller , Michael Hofmann (Translator)

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Set in Romania at the height of Ceausescu's reign of terror, "The

Land of Green Plums" tells the story of a group of young students, each of whom has left the impoverished provinces in search of better prospects in the city. It is a profound illustration of a totalitarian state which comes to inhabit every aspect of life; to the extent that everyone, even the strongest, must either bend to the oppressors, or resist them and perish.

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The Land of Green Plums Details

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From Reader Review The Land of Green Plums for online ebook

Tony says

There are (were) Germans in Romania? Swabians, I think they are called. I confess a gap here. I knew, of course, about Germans in Czechoslovakia. A convenient *casus belli*. But there was this community of Germans in Romania after one shuffling of nations. (Don't tell Adolf!)

Herta Müller was one of them. This work (maybe all her works, from what I've read) is semi-autobiographical. Her father had been a member of the *Waffen SS* during World War II, and earned a living as a truck driver in Communist Romania. Romania, sensing a loser, switched sides midway. In 1945 her mother, then aged 17, was along with 100,000 others of the German minority deported to forced labor camps in the Soviet Union, from which she was released in 1950. The Swabians were put upon by the Ceaușescu regime, seems to be the point of Müller's work.

Fully understanding that I might be penalized by the Nobel Committee, I nevertheless am hard-pressed to cough up any sympathy for Nazis or their children. I'm a hard case. I do not equate the snooping through mail with the eradication of Jews, Poles, Homosexuals and Gypsies. A word of contrition would have helped.

That said....

As a purely literary effort, this had merit. It's poetic, and rife with symbolism.

My brother drives the sheep home in the evening, writes Lola. He has to cross through the melon field. He's left the pasture too late, it's getting dark, and the sheep with their bony shanks are stepping on the melons and smashing them. My brother sleeps in the shed, and the sheep have red feet the whole night long.

(Is there a point where symbolism is too obvious? Watermelons, Müller's sheep and McCarthy's (Suttree) mental deficient: Contrast and Compare. Discuss.)

I've tried these two sober and, you know, otherwise:

Booze protects the skull from the forbidden, and fodder protects the mouth. Even when the tongue can only babble, the habit of fear does not desert the voice.

And....

People say it only snows when a good person dies. That's not true.

And yet I liked it. I do because I do not condemn, well not always, when I read, if I learn something (I did) and if the writing is good (it was).

I could have taken the snarky out and just quoted what I liked. And there would have been plenty. But then I might have lost my *Herztier*.* So let me choose just one of many passages which moved me, in a literary kind of way, something perhaps which will make you want to read this:

The child has two grandmothers. One brings her love to the child at bedtime, and the child looks up at the

white ceiling because she knows that Grandmother is about to start praying. The other brings her love to the child at bedtime, and the child gazes into her dark eyes, because she knows that Grandmother is about to start singing.

When the child can no longer bear the sight of the ceiling or the dark eyes, she pretends to sleep. The first grandmother doesn't finish her prayer. She gets up in the middle and walks out. The other grandmother finishes her song, her face is crooked because she loves singing so much.

When her song is finished, she thinks the child is fast asleep. She says: Rest your heart-beast now, you've played so much today.

The singing grandmother outlives the praying grandmother by nine years. And she outlives her own reason by six years. She no longer recognized anyone in the house. All she remembers are her songs.

One evening she walks from the corner of the room to the table and says, in the glow of the light, I'm so glad you're all with me in Heaven. She doesn't realize she's alive and that she'll have to sing herself to death. No illness will come to help her die.

**Herztier*, the title of this book in the original German, is, I'm reliably told, not a word in German. But it is translated here as 'heart-beast'. Make your own meaning. More or less. But know it has a rapid pulse. It comes from asking How to Be Both. It wants to be calmed, soothed, by some lullaby. Which works, I promise...

...until the next night.

Salathiel says

I wanted to like this book. I really did. With it being the spawn of a Nobel Laureate and a book that purposed to explore the human side-effects of dictatorial Romania, I was certain that this book would tickle my literary side while also indulging my inner humanitarian. But sadly, it didn't.

The biggest reason for its failure? It simply was too confusing. I love the well-turned phrase as much as the next one, but when poetry and beauty starts to inhibit the progression of plot and understanding, then I begin to wish that the author had perhaps written with a more fine tuned balance. The writing at times was beautiful, hauntingly so. But when I, who by my own humble estimations am a very perceptive and strong reader, would finish passages and pages to be left wondering what has just happened; then I am not only left to scratch the head, but I am also left wondering if age has finally caught up with me and the destruction of my brain cells has officially begun. Not my idea of the results of "pleasurable" reading.

This novel was about a subject matter that I am sure few Westerners have ever explored, that being the totalitarian government that emerged in Romania following World War II. While I am not necessarily a historical novel buff, I do appreciate it when I can read a fictitious account that while successfully entertaining me, also is simultaneously teaching me. The fact that I was able to complete this novel and am leaving with pretty much the same knowledge of this phase in Romania's history as when I came in, means

that something went dismally awry. I didn't expect, and never really desired, to feel like I was reading a history text, but I did expect to feel somehow absorbed in and connected to this period of history in a more intimate way.

I will say, that as the novel progressed, I was able to steady myself a bit, and to appreciate the happenings with a more discerning eye. However, though the muddying cleared to provide windows of clarity, I still found myself not as emotionally invested as I envisioned I would be. This was a story of college students being tormented by the government for being liberal minded and nonconformist. And while that premise would draw most readers in, including myself, the happenings that surrounded these students were unnecessarily muted simply because the style of writing did not support the kind of character investing that makes these events memorable. Even now, writing this review about a week after finishing, I can barely remember who lived, who died, how did the novel end, and what lesson did the nameless protagonist take with her that somehow made this story, her story, worth being told.

With all that being said, I would not dissuade anyone from reading this book. It helped Muller win the Nobel Prize for a reason, and I am certain that a more refined reader will find the patience to methodically read this one and think heavily on each image and analogy. This book felt big, and even though I have been more scathing than gentle, even I can understand that this book was heavy with layers that went beyond a rehashing of events and emotions. There is a message here, and if you are willing to take a deep plunge, I am sure you will glean what that message is.

Muller's writing was a paradigm of beauty, but for me it got in the way of what I felt should have been not simply a story, but an experience. I feel blasphemous for rating this one a two, and maybe when I am older and more seasoned I will come to regret such willfulness, but as of right now, a two is more than fitting to capture my experience traipsing through *The Land of Green Plums*.

Nelson Zagalo says

O Nobel atrai, naturalmente, mas o que me interessava nesta obra era o seu contexto, a vida sob o regime comunista da Roménia pré-Revolução. Em 1989 assisti àquilo que foi a primeira Revolução emitida em direto pelo meio de televisão, em desacordo com o título do poema de Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” (1970), ainda que não com o conteúdo da sua mensagem.

[imagem]

A revolução foi televisionada.

Era adolescente, nascido um par de meses após a Revolução portuguesa (1974), tendo passado toda a minha vida a ouvir falar da Revolução que tinha permitido aos meus pais voltarem ao seu país, e libertado todo um povo. Na minha cabeça tudo era uma mancha de abstrações, a vida vivida na Europa e em Portugal desde então era calma, a cultura pop dos anos 1980 tomava conta dos nossos imaginários e a revolução parecia um passado distante, em certa medida e dada a ingenuidade da infância, chegava a parecer insignificante.

Quando em 1989 estava a passar as férias escolares de Natal no Luxemburgo, por ocasião de um regresso temporário dos meus pais ao país para onde tinham fugido da nossa ditadura nos anos 1960, fui surpreendido pelos eventos que eclodiam em Timisoara. No mês anterior, o Muro de Berlim tinha caído, e com ele o comunismo europeu tinha chegado ao fim, mas o líder romeno, Ceausescu então com 71 anos, não conseguindo lidar com a ideia de fim, recusou a demissão, mantendo-se no pedestal ilusório que tinha criado

ao longo de 24 anos de ditadura.

[imagem]

A bandeira romena com o rasgo circular em que estava o brasão comunista.

Foram duas semanas em que quase mais nada se falou ou viveu, os romenos éramos nós, passados 15 anos. A televisão, à custa do regime, usava todas as estratégias narrativas para nos manter colados ao ecrã — mistério, suspense, vilões, heróis, maldade, ganância e muitos inocentes — até a labirintos subterrâneos e passagens secretas tivemos direito. É impossível esquecer as bandeiras romenas tricolores com rasgos circulares ao centro, marcando a purga do brasão comunista da bandeira nacional. Mas para quem era ainda apenas um adolescente, o mais marcante estaria ainda para vir, chegando no próprio dia de Natal com as imagens do julgamento do casal Ceausescu, tendo as imagens do seu fuzilamento sido apenas reveladas mais tarde. Era o fim, mas ao contrário, porque era o nascimento de um novo país. Por muito que tivesse sido ensinado a olhar a morte como algo profundamente contra-natura, não pude deixar de a ver como a catarse última daquela Revolução, por representar a permissão para todo um país poder finalmente acreditar que podia falar livremente.

[imagem]

Imagen do último discurso de Ceausescu, em direto na televisão nacional romena, marcada pela expressão de incompreensão originada pela multidão que ousa, pela primeira vez em 24 anos, desobedecer e assobiar o seu líder. O seu discurso não durou mais de 2 minutos.

A Roménia, tal como Portugal, tinha uma polícia secreta, a nossa era a PIDE, a deles era a Securitate. Salazar era nacionalista, de inspiração fascista, Ceausescu era comunista, na aparência separados por polos políticos opostos mas em essência juntos, ambos ditadores. As suas polícias serviam a manutenção das suas ditaduras, através da constante vigilância que se socorria de legiões de bufos, impondo-se pelo desrespeito de quaisquer direitos que fossem contrários aos supostos interesses dos estados. A tortura era a punição mais comum, mas servia essencialmente a produção de medo, sustentando os regimes no terror.

E é exatamente sobre este último ponto que Herta Mueller nos fala em “A Terra das Ameixas Verdes”, principalmente a opressão e repressão operadas pelo regime de Ceausescu. Mas fá-lo de um modo completamente particular, não seguindo princípios romaneses melodramáticos, esquivando-se às formulas de lágrima fácil. O trabalho de Mueller assenta numa espécie de escalpelização dos efeitos psicológicos do regime, mas acima de tudo numa tentativa formalista de dar a experienciar esses efeitos a quem lê.

[imagem]

Para o efeito, Mueller produziu um texto completamente único, em que as pequenas histórias vão sendo apresentadas como que aos soluços, com pausas, intermitências, recuos e avanços no tempo, cortes abruptos da linearidade discursiva, tudo polvilhado por uma camada de elementos simbólicos muitas vezes indecifráveis. O resultado é um texto difícil, mas acima de tudo uma incapacidade de descortinar sentidos completos do que se vai lendo, que acabam por se assemelhar ao que vai sentindo cada um dos personagens que habitam sob aquele regime. Um desespero por querer compreender, dar sentido, explicar, atribuir uma lógica, ‘porque fazem o que fazem?’ . Este sentimento é ainda mais enfatizado pela exploração da escrita de cartas entre os personagens, que por terem de passar os crivos da polícia, não podiam nunca ser explícitas, e que de algum modo a obra pela sua estética nos vai fazendo sentir para compreender a psicologia de quem as escrevia.

No fim deste livro podemos sentir de perto os efeitos de um estado policial, a autora conseguiu criar através da arte escrita um pequeno acesso ao horror de quem vive soterrado mentalmente por uma Thinkpol, a polícia do pensamento de Orwell (1947). Choca e dói porque o que aqui se relata não é ficção, não surge da imaginação de quem escreveu, mas da experiência de quem viveu. Pensar que todo um povo pode a tal ser submetido, pensar que 22 milhões de romenos, 9 milhões de portugueses, mas também muitos milhares de milhões ao longo da história das várias civilizações tiveram de por aqui passar, dói. Como diz Muller, já perto do final, “transfinito é uma janela que não desaparece quando alguém caiu dela”.

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Pooriya says

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?ntellecta says

"Herztier" who would like to Reading this book, should be aware that this is not an entertainment reading. Books about bad times are often rated differently. She tells her story in a highly poetic, very associative, but at the same time in a very robust language. This book leaves a mixed sense. In the shock of the narrated events the admiration for the literary achievement mingles. Especially the language enthusiastic, in which the female characters are described very sensitively. At the beginning, the narrative style also confused me. The text seems to be crack and fragmentary, but one you have read in and adapted to the peculiar style of the author, then you can enjoy this Book.

Elham says

I've never read a novel of politics like *The Land of Green Plums* before and I'm happy that I read it and learn about a country that I've never come across with its literary world. Herta Müller won Nobel prize in literature in 2009.

The author uses so many signs in different ways to show the political and social dictatorship of the time communist reign (Nicolae Ceau?escu) in Romania. Sometimes it's surrealist, sometimes it is nonlinear and some other times it's a dark reality.

We don't read much about the political activities of the characters, we read the consequences; the fears, hates, secrets and pains..

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Herztier = The Land of Green Plums, Herta Müller

The Land of Green Plums (German: Herztier) is a novel by Herta Müller, published in 1994 by Rowohlt Verlag. Perhaps Müller's best-known work, the story portrays four young people living in a totalitarian police state under the Soviet-imposed communist dictatorship in Romania, ending with their emigration to Germany. The narrator is an unidentified young woman belonging to the ethnic German minority. Müller said the novel was written "in memory of my Romanian friends who were killed under the Ceau?escu regime".

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Praj says

The Land of Green Plums is an overwhelming allegorical saga of Banat Swabians (German minority populace) inhabiting in Romania, who lived under constant scrutiny and fear after WWII; especially throughout vigilant torment of Nicolae Ceau?escu(1965-1989).

** *Whatever you carry out of your province, you carry out in your face.*

** *When we don't speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable and when we do, we make fools of ourselves.*

Muller delineates the story of barren lands, mournful eyes, optimistic hearts and spirited beliefs perishing into nothingness wondering how the sky would look from the cold depths of a grave.

Steven Godin says

It was all in their eyes, Romanian eyes, eyes of fear, eyes of suffering, eyes of sadness. Fast forward, 1989, December 25, how could I forget, Christmas day. Family, festive spirits, presents, death by firing squad, Nicolae Ceau?escu, wife Elena, two tickets, one way...Hell. "The Land of Green Plums" a moving account for a group of students trying to better themselves under Ceau?escu's reign of terror, living in a totalitarian state, that would effect every aspect day after day. Poverty stricken, tormented souls, hope a million miles away, stand hand in hand with the oppressors, or perish like a fist full of dust. Trapped behind the Iron certain, no gaps in between, no sun. Despondent faces stare at the ground, desolate eyes look to the heavens. Müller's prose, hypnotic, mentally agonizing, relentlessly powerful, bleak and wholly unconventional. Read partly in a cafe, on the metro, and the comforts of home, but would have seemed more fitting to have sat on an old stool, in the corner of a small room, facing walls of decay.

Final thoughts?... gruelling ,debilitating, stunned!, the writing at times was almost too much to bear. Will never forget, but don't want to remember.

Stephen Durrant says

No one writes quite like Herta Müller. One reviewer has spoken of her "incantatory prose," which describes well the almost hypnotic rhythm of her sentences. Another characteristic of her writing is that she invariably describes things from I guess what I would say "the other way around." Often this involves an element of personification. A person does not carry a suitcase but the suitcase "stretches her arm." A woman bathed in light does not look up at the crucifix hanging on the dark wall, but "Jesus looks down from a dark place on the wall at the bright face below." And on and on. What makes these features remarkable, at least in my view, is that they somehow convey in prose the dehumanized, flattened world of dictatorship in general and Ceausescu's Romania more specifically. Müller's vision is a terrifying without indulging, at least in this novel, in sensationalist violence. She remains one of our best warnings against the evils of the totalitarian state.

Greg Brozeit says

„Wenn wir schweigen, werden wir unangenehm, sagte Edgar, wenn wir reden, werden wir lächerlich.“

("When we're silent, we become unpleasant, said Edgar, when we speak, we become laughable.")

I'm finally getting comfortable with Müller's writing. It is like looking through a disorganized, virtual scrapbook filled with mementos, photos, and short snippets of grainy 8 mm films. The story doesn't start

taking shape until the reader thinks about what those mementos are connected to and pays as much attention to what's just outside the frame as what is in it. That, combined with her terse, direct sentences, forms the story. Although I have complained about how Thomas Mann makes the reader work hard, I know that I'm being hypocritical in appreciating it when Müller does it. So call me a hypocrite.

Although I didn't grow up in Romania behind the Iron Curtain, I did spend significant periods of my teen and early adult years in East Germany (which, admittedly, was not as stark). Müller has a way of bringing back images that I thought I had forgotten. Her story is about the double standards, fears, and simple hopes that totalitarianism bred among its people. Her writing style is appropriate because there is no real linear, sensible way to really appreciate, digest or understand it. One hopefully just does. That's why I like and respect this story so much.

The title, *Herztier*, or as I would translate it, "animal heart," seems so appropriate and it is, in my view, a shame that the translators in English chose the title they did. I understand why, but this story is about so much more than the land of plums. It is about the how the heart lost much of its humanity under the rule of Ceausescu. Even if one escapes it, the scars make it hard to become fully, trustingly human. But, then again, it's not just totalitarianism that breeds animal hearts among us.

„Wenn wir schweigen, werden wir unangenehm, sagte Edgar, wenn wir reden, werden wir lächerlich.“

William2.1 says

Possesses a narrative patterning that is strikingly beautiful. There's compression, too, and suspense, though it's not a mystery or thriller. It's character driven so there's no real plot. Yet the vivid picture Herta Müller paints of Communist Romania under dictator Nicolae Ceau?escu is an absolute horror. I mean, the inanity of harassing perfectly harmless people and interrogating them and humiliating them for no purpose other than to instill fear and, thus, submission. Hannah Arendt's phrase "the banality of evil" springs to mind. Herta Müller has taken a hideous thing and made transcendent art from it. A captivating stunner of a novel but dark, dark.

jo says

it seems to me that if you want or need to write about the intensely traumatic life of people under a brutal dictatorship, writing with the language of children is a good way to go.

i deduce from other things i've read by herta m?ller (okay, basically only her nobel lecture, which i can't recommend highly enough), that this novel is autobiographical, and i find profoundly inspirational that she helped herself through the process of writing about her trauma by using great inventiveness of imagery and language, and fantastic turns of events. in spite of being dark, this book is suffused with the special sweetness that comes from narrating events through the lens of child-play. trauma is so, so difficult to tell, and if lovely simple imagery helps us through the telling, well, dang, we should totally use it.

so look, this is not a super easy book to read, because you need to don your childlike glasses and let yourself

be taken by plums and wooden objects and tin objects and sacks of canvas and pillowcases and barbers and nailclippings, and at first, since you are so thoroughly weaned from the magic of childhood, you will be confused. you will want to *understand*; you will expect the narrator to explain. eventually, though, the language will train you back into looking at things with the eyes and forbearance of a child, and you will understand pretty much everything.

which is -- the everything that needs to be understood -- that petty quotidian abuse and the systematic reminder that your freedom is taken away from you without rhyme or reason or any possibility for appeal cause a distress so deep that surviving it is well nigh impossible. there are, maybe, hints of true blue torture in here, but mostly what grinds down the soul of the young and older people who populate this beautiful, beautiful novel is their daily subjection to indignity, oppression, humiliation, suspicion, and fear.

i don't want to give the impression that this is all high fantasy, because it isn't. under the language of childish words there is a clear, realist story, and you can reconstruct it pretty well. but the language, well the language made the book more tolerable for me to read, and maybe (this is my starting theory) more tolerable for the writer to write, too.

because children have this tremendous tolerance for horror, and what is horrific to us -- the wolf eating red riding hood's grandmother -- is story to them, and stories make you stronger. stories allow you to experience pain without too much bite. stories give you the demons and the saviors, too.

the present-time of the narration is alternated with flashbacks of the narrator's childhood, and i found these little vignettes, inserted seamlessly in the text, very powerful. they felt to me reminders that this is a book written in some ways by a child (in some ways, because the narrator is in fact a university student), but since the stories contained in them are pretty straightforwardly bitter, they also brought home to me that it is easier for the childlike narrator to play a little when telling the story of her present trauma if she tells the pain of her childhood straight up. in other words, the childlike narrator has to establish herself as a lucid and direct narrator of her own childhood, so that the childlike quality of her narrative of her adulthood be grounded and rooted in the honesty and truthfulness of the story of her childhood pain.

i don't quite know why things were not better for our narrator when she was a child. i don't know whether she looks back at her childhood and tinges it with the horrors of the present. i don't know if her childhood is meant to represent the childhood of all children and all adults under ceausescu. It is quite possible that this was her childhood -- that it wasn't a good childhood. those were the parts that hit me the most: the unadorned pain of a little girl.

even though this, for the reasons i have explained, was not the easiest read, i couldn't put it down, and always looked forward to going back to it. it's beautiful writing, and an important story, and in my opinion quite a masterpiece.

Julia says

When i started to read, i thought: "Oh no, stream-of-conscious-like, unconnected episodes in a weird language....", but as i progressed i slowly started to appreciate Müller's unusual language. The metaphors are strange, but are very expressive. They make you feel the oppressive atmosphere in a totalitarian regime, one starts to feel persecuted by "harmless men with dogs" walking behind you, one can relate perfectly well to how the characters grow more and more hopeless and depressed despite of their deep friendship and mutual

support. The descriptions of a bleak, barren suppressed country are very accurate, and the story of Lola, the girl with a poor area stamped on her face who commits suicide is terrifyingly sad. I love the author for her criticism not only of the dictatorship and its blind followers, but also herself: After the death of the girl, there's a conference at school for expelling her post mortem of the communist party and all the teachers raise arms to show their loyalty in the voting out of fear to be suspicious themselves if they don't. After the scene, the narrator (who is easily identifiable with the author) sits in a park and counts all the people who would've done the same, and is devastated at the realisation that she wouldn't be an exception. it shows how a system of control and angst corrupts virtually everyone.

this is a really weird little book, it even haunted me during night....or better, the vulnerable, yet strong voice of the narrator which pierces like glass despite of being quite obscure in some sequels....if you want to understand how life was in communist Romania - and probably in any system depending on control and censorship -, read this book. despite of the bleak topic it's a beautiful, if not enyoyable read. i don't know about the competition, but i do think that Herta Müller deserves the praise and awards she got.

Arman Mohammadi Yazdi says

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Orsodimondo says

LA MADRE È BRAVA. L'ALBERO È VERDE. L'ACQUA SCORRE. LA SABBIA È PESANTE. IL SOLE BRUCIA.

Benvenuti al festival della metafora, dove anche un punto fermo è la metafora di una virgola e due punti di un punto interrogativo.

Uno sguardo pieno d'angoscia, al quale la realtà appare gravida di minacce, forse, non poteva esprimersi se non per metafore?

André Thijssen: Car with Balls, USA, 2002.

La bestia del cuore del titolo originale (*Herztier*) si è trasformata nel paese delle prugne verdi della traduzione italiana: chi sa, magari il titolo era già stato usato da un brutto libro italiano di successo, oppure le prugne verdi erano più metaforiche della bestia nel cuore?

L'insalata cresceva rosso scura e ruvida e frusciava nei sentieri come carta. E le patate erano verdi e amare sotto la buccia e avevano occhi sprofondati nella carne.

Non tutte le altre metafore sono così belle e soprattutto così cristalline.

Bucarest.

In un paese passato direttamente dalle SS alla Securitate... in un paese dove non si usavano coltelli e forchette, ma solo cucchiai, perché fosse più facile scambiare *la paura con la follia*... in un paese dove si poteva *camminare lentamente o rapidamente, andare di soppiatto, o correre a perdifiato* e invece andare a spasso era stato dimenticato... in un paese dove le valigie sono una presenza ossessiva, una sotto ogni letto, e gli armadi nascondono segreti che sono poesie o capelli, ma anche il suicidio bisogna nasconderlo dentro un armadio... in un paese dove si viene picchiati, e se si viene picchiati una ragione deve esserci per forza... in un paese di bevitori di sangue, alle donne va sempre peggio, come ovunque peraltro, le donne vengono stuprate e messe incinta, si impiccano dentro gli armadi... in un paese così, le prugne verdi fanno male e la bestia cresce a dismisura nel cuore.

Dal film del 1993 “Vulpe-vânator” di Stete Gulea, sceneggiato da Herta Müller.

Non è vero che sia un libro che si ama o si odia, non credo a questo genere di definizione, né per i libri né per gli scrittori.

Non è vero che sia un libro difficile: o, almeno, non è il primo, non sarà l'ultimo, e non è il più difficile.

Non è vero che i Nobel per la letteratura si diano ai libri o agli scrittori migliori, spesso si danno per motivi politici, a volte, ma raramente, a scrittori mediocri.

Ci sono pagine e momenti molto belli nel romanzo di Herta Müller, ma non tutto sembra alla stessa altezza.

Tunnel sotterraneo a uso della Securitate.

Non sarà facile 'liberarsi' di questo libro, si appiccica all'anima, è vischioso, continua a far riflettere. E non è un male.

Documenti di polizia dopo la “primavera” romena dell’inverno 1989.

Evan says

Like the Aira novel I just reviewed, I felt something lost in translation here. I picked up this novel after reading Jesse Ball's Curfew and seeing another critic on Goodreads claim that Land of Green Plums was a better entry in the genre. The genre, I guess, is that of Kafka-- absurdist fairy tales of life in a police state. It seems a little silly to rank Muller and Ball. The difference between them might be summed as the difference

between a Central/Eastern European and an American sensibility. Ball is attracted to the genre as an exotic aesthetic; for Muller, this is realism. The question for Muller as for so many Soviet-era writers (I'm thinking of the newly departed Vaclav Havel) is how to write about terror as a way of life. A certain distance is needed, thus the parable form. That said, Muller is harrowingly blunt. The novel proceeds like an unfolding nightmare that goes on and on, one horrible image following another. The prose is fascinating-- on the one hand, the sentences are simple and quick to read; however, the progression of images are so blunt and jarring that I often found myself stopping and re-reading a section to get a clearer sense of the implication of an action. The novel follows a group of friends trying to live in the capitol, with some degree of youthful aspiration to build their careers, who inescapably get drawn into the surveillance culture, which progressively dismantles them, killing several of them. At a certain point, it occurred to me that I was reading the dark inverse of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Whereas Woolf imagines a group of friends flowing from infancy to old age as an awesome journey of development and self-discovery, Muller's youthful community is compromised immediately, and progressively crushed even as they bloom. Leave it to an Eastern European writer to make Virginia Woolf appear the optimist by comparison!

Mariel says

"Not everyone is lucky enough to be able to say openly how they feel in their hearts. Some people have to keep their hearts hidden." - Alfred Chester

A table and a chair now stood in the cube where Lola's bed had been. And on the table, a big preserving jar with long sprays from the scruffy park, dwarf white roses with delicately serrated leaves. The branches put down white roots in the water. The girls could walk and eat and sleep in the cube. They weren't afraid to sing in front of Lola's leaves.

The friends of the uniformed suicidal, carrier of the hunger fleas from her province, go looking for the drum beats of hunger pains like it was a dust bowl in dream songs (gotta be country songs) no one remembers all the way to their bitter end because no one wrote them down on waking. The girls in the cube couldn't speak in front of Lola. The group-think pamphlets sprung up around her bed. They were the eyelash tears of little Alice in her jar. Won't you help me, somebody. Lola's notebook spoke the truth of a dream you can't remember. It was Alice with her angry confusion when none of it made any sense. It didn't really know what anyone else's hearts looked like either. I think this is important. She really liked the title of the "head director" of the school. I wouldn't have uttered a word around Lola, either. You just can't trust her.

I don't blame anyone who didn't like Lola. She stole their clothes, returning them to their closet unwashed. Yes, she was hungry. But do her hunger pains wash the rains from the faces of anyone else?

*Everyone had a friend in every wisp of cloud
that's how it is with friends where the world is full of fear
even my mother said, that's how it is
friends are out of the question
think of more serious things*

She puts a finger to her cheek to count herself in the thousand out of every thousand. Will no one stand up? She won't. She knows that Lola wouldn't have either. She falls in step with three male friends. They meet to

talk about Lola. Georg, Edgar and Kurt. They meet to keep her notebook in their heads as if the cheap ink of their country would stain their fingertips to speak for them what they never would. You can tell by my hands that they would make gestures they never would in real life. What is real life.

They recite the poem about every wisp of cloud. It beats their friends, it keeps distances, it feeds the hunger with a larger stomach to hold more emptiness. Trust no one.

Have you seen the National Geographic documentary on North Korea? The one hosted by Lisa Ling. Did you want to punch in her in the face when she interviews a "typical" family in their home? Pushing them to express doubts, or criticize their leader. This family lived for what passes for a blessed life in North Korea. But she would have them condemn themselves and everyone related to them (anyone who will ever again be related to them) to life in prison or death. Just for her stupid interview. She made a lot of smug "Look how brainwashed everyone is!" faces to the camera. Talk about really not getting it.

The group of friends meet to read secret books in the language of their families, German. When they leave school they split the books between them and they will become the wisp of cloud in those unfortunate enough to associate with them. Not that they, like the insufferable Lisa Ling, get it. They will not read the books again. I thought that was important.

When she speaks to her friends they will write down the words of Lola. They don't write her own words, Lola's replacement. I had the feeling she would only write her own words when she was dead like Lola. Not dead in life but on one side with no moving limbs to touch other colors, another truth. Like when the married lover she doesn't give a fuck about dies escaping over the border with his wife. He is only real when she thinks he might have thought she might be able to sing (their official tormentor, the Captain Pjele, has her sing his words). What would he have done to her? When the cost is final she is real like Lola. Lola was real when she was dead. I don't know what "safe" is but I had that squirmy feeling about the open eye on trespassers. She will "accidentally" leave contraband in the homes of unsuspecting associations. She never knew them. They carry secrets in their hearts, their own lives and pains. She doesn't know them. What can you do for me? When she has been allowed to escape Romania into Germany she will cut off her friend Tereza (and wouldn't you know they bear grudges against this woman who THEY are using, not the other way around) for pretending to go around with the Captain to be allowed a German visit before cancer takes her once and for all. Oh, but she tries to let the grasses of love grow again. Or does she want to nurse the old viper once and for all of death of the heart. Muller's book puts a toe in both truths but the toe steps more often on the side of your ass is grass and I've got a lawn mower. They don't think the authorities had something on Tereza to threaten her with because THEY put the books in HER home, in HER office locker. Every wisp of cloud, right?

The officers escaped from the there are worse jobs in the provinces of hunger to eat unripened plums on the side of the road. Walk as quietly as you can, don't let them notice you too much.

I wouldn't have been able to hold their pain with my own, if I were living with them. Tereza is always saying that all of the food reeks. I would smell the reek, it would turn my appetite to dust in my mouth. Kurt is obsessed with if the men who work in the slaughterhouse where he is an engineer are blood guzzlers. He will speak of nothing else. I was surprised he ended his own life. I am surprised he didn't have a wisp of cloud to whisper the possibility that the hungry men might drink his blood too. Someone has to stay warm. He fucked one of their little daughters and hated her for it. I don't know if I would have had enough left over to pity Kurt or Georg when the poor little girl with nothing is used so cruelly by them. If you can see another human being as garbage can you say it is the fault of someone else, your government, when you have a secret heart of I can't. When the girl in their group leaves a burden on the seamstress, doesn't know that she is Hungarian

after all, was the life of motions of whomever may be watching the burden of the audience. Tereza, the one they abandon, says that she wasn't German yet knew her friend was. That's right. You don't have to be someone else to accept that they have a heart and a life of their own. I don't care they dismissed Tereza as stupid or not as good as them. Stupid means good enough to use? Tereza took the risk on friendship. Both girls have broken hearts but I feel that only one didn't push the pain along with fevered reassurances of death.

But they forgot that they were no longer permitted to stroke or slap this face. That they could no longer touch it. Our mothers' illnesses sensed that, for us, untying was a beautiful word.

Muller is also kind of a genius with overlaying the letters from home. Behind words of how life has made them sick they pleaded for their children to remember them. Love me. Give me meaning. The (privileged) college students would not understand what they had because they had to be free from the love of home. They couldn't see as they were counting the thousand in every thousand of who they couldn't trust what anyone else had, or what they had had. I think that is most likely common everywhere from all times that anyone with a mother cannot feel past that weight how it feels for someone else. I saw that Edgar was goddamned lucky to have a family to come home to.

After I read *The Land of Green Plums* I went online to look for a book about prostitution in communist countries (unsuccessful. Recommendations would be appreciated, if anyone knows of any good ones). I have had this impression for a long time that it was taken for granted that all women were prostitutes by the men (and the women. The cutting of returning female soldiers in Russia was just so awful). It really pissed me off. I kinda love Muller for a quote from another book of hers that where others saw a woman selling herself for bread she saw a beautiful woman and hunger hurts. I don't think that she could see windows with the light left on in others and nothing but dark masses for the rest. But the toe does return too often to one sore spot. "Plums" would write inside my head book when it knew that people like the seamstress were people in their own right, with secrets of their own, more than some other loud truth of how you can't trust anyone. Lola speaks louder once she is dead. Georg falls to his death and his friends feel safe to love him, now. This bothers me more than I can say. From what I've read about her other books I have had this feeling that silence and what a person will live with about their true selves is important to Muller. It is. But it isn't only important to one person. People have to live. So I don't care if North Koreans are public about hating their leader if it means they have to die to do it. I don't know what is in their hearts and I will never say they or anyone else doesn't have one. Her female protagonist returns often to thoughts of those in her community who are succumbed to insanity (blessed or victims is debatable). To her it is an option. I don't know how I feel about death or insanity as options against a common reality. You don't know. This is a hard book. It rubs up against all of the hard places and reminds you of where it hurts, where it has been untied and where there isn't weight. I hope to never be like them and think I know about everyone else. It's hard in this world. Everyone has to sell every day. Governments take your money and do something unspeakable to someone else. You go to work and your days go by to where you don't want to be. You get tired. Someone talks too much about blood guzzlers and reekers and you want it all to stop. I know and I know. I'll probably read *The Hunger Angel* next. I think a lot about the "luxury" of tears and she does too.

Jim Fonseca says

Another gem from the Nobel Prize-winning author (2009) of *The Hunger Angel* and *The Appointment*. She writes about life in Romania under the communist dictator Ceausescu (1965-1989). Muller grew up as a

member of Romania's large German minority and she writes in German.

A group of young people from impoverished rural backgrounds are thrown together in college dorms in the big city – the young women, six to a room. The oppression of the dictator is everywhere and talk of his health is constant. Rumors (hopes) of his illnesses, the more severe the better, are talked about every day. One of the women kills herself and that is followed by compulsory attendance at a meeting in an auditorium to admonish her memory. The rules and regulations, the spying and the reporting, the fear of being followed, the inability to really trust anyone else or to safely hide anything for fear of search is stifling:

“We sat together at a table, but our fear stayed locked within each of our heads, just as we’d brought it to our meetings. We laughed a lot, to hide it from each other. But fear always finds an out. If you control your face, it slips into your voice. If you manage to keep a grip on your face and your voice, as if they were dead wood, it will slip out through your fingers. It will pass through your skin and lie there. You can see it lying around on objects close by.”

The narrator is a young woman and her only escape is that she hangs out with a group of young men in a summer house reading banned books. The thrill of discovery is the only thing that counteracts the fear and the boredom. Resist or die: they chose resistance and experience betrayal.

Top photo from Bucharestlife.net

Bottom photo from Kami's blog Mywanderlust.pl