

METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HUNGER AND LABOR IN HERTA

MÜLLER'S *ATEMSCHAUKE*L

by

BETHANY AMATO MORGAN

(Under the Direction of Dr. Martin Kagel)

ABSTRACT

My thesis offers a reading of Herta Müller's novel, *Atemschaukel*, published in the same year that the author won the Nobel Prize for Literature. I explore Müller's use of metaphors and demonstrate how Müller not only uses metaphor, symbol and allegory to overcome linguistic limitations of expressing suffering, but also how she uses these poetic devices to accurately describe one inmate's daily reality of systematic starvation, to represent more than just hunger or labor. My thesis focuses on Müller's style and the aesthetics of the novel. I address her use of metaphors and how they function. Specifically, I address Müller's metaphors of hunger and labor in the camp and what they represent for the protagonist Leo Auberg.

INDEX WORDS: metaphor theory, labor camp, Herta Müller, Oskar Pastior, hunger, chronic hunger, chronic desire, agency, totalitarianism, labor, heart shovel, hunger angel, *Atemschaukel*

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CHAPTER 1  
CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP ON HERTA MÜLLER'S MAJOR WORKS, WITH  
SPECIFIC ATTENTION TO *ATEMSCHAUKE*L

Herta Müller was born in 1953 in Nitzkydorf, a German-speaking village in the Romanian Banat. She relocated to Timisoara, where she later attended university. Here she became part of the *Aktionsgruppe Banat*, a group of Romanian-German writers who sought freedom of expression under the Ceaușescu dictatorship. The group was dissolved by communist authorities. After completing her studies she worked as a translator in a machine factory, until she was fired for refusing to cooperate with the Securitate.

Müller's experiences of growing up as a member of the ethnic German minority in Romania and of living under a totalitarian regime became the subject of her writings. She became well-known in Germany after an uncensored edition of her first book, *Niederungen*, was published in 1984. In 1987 she emigrated to Germany with her then husband, Richard Wagner, and has since lived in Berlin. Since *Niederungen*, Müller has published more than 20 works and has received more than 20 awards, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009. The major themes and topics of her works are: the effects of violence and terror, daily life under a dictatorship, and the German minority's village life in Romania.

My thesis focuses on her 2009 novel *Atemschaugel* (*The Hunger Angel*), the story about a young Romanian-German man, who is deported to a forced labor camp in the Soviet Union in 1945. Historically, these deportations of ethnic Germans from Romania



to the Soviet Union took place from January 10–February 1, 1945 (Polian 253). The deportations and forced manual labor were considered part of Germany's reparations to countries that had suffered economic losses from Germany's aggression during the war (247). Auberg explains this as follows: "Wir waren alle in keinem Krieg, aber für die Russen waren wir als Deutsche schuld an Hitlers Verbrechen" (Müller 44). Because Romania had the largest ethnic German population of any East European countries, Romanian-Germans comprised  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the targeted population (257). The targeted age group for these deportations was able-bodied men aged seventeen to forty-five and women aged eighteen to thirty (250). Approximately sixty-nine thousand men and women who fit these requirements of ability and age were interned (260). In the novel, Auberg was sent to "NOWO-GORLOWKA" in the Ukraine (Müller 58). The largest labor camps were in Stalino, Voroshilovgrad and Dnepropetrovski in the Ukraine (Polian 278). For the Russians, ethnic Germans were regarded as "an expendable work force" and their living conditions and state of health were of little concern (280). Inmates "who died of hunger, cold, and hard labor were replaced by new prisoners," and they received minimal food rations according to how much work they did (*Gulag*). Because of the harsh conditions relating to the extreme weather, lack of adequate nourishment and long hours of forced manual labor, the inmates were effectively dehumanized and many of them perished. An estimated twenty percent of deportees did not return to their homes (Merten 267).

Müller draws heavily from the personal experiences of her friend, the poet Oskar Pastior, and those of her own mother, both of whom were deported in 1945 and forced to work in Soviet camps for five years. Pastior was born in 1927 in the German-speaking

part of Romania. After his return from the Soviet forced labor camp, he studied German Language and Literature at the University of Bucharest. He published his first collection of poems, *Offne Worte*, in 1964. In 1968 while studying in Vienna, he decided to leave, emigrated to the west and lived in Berlin until his death in 2006. His first book of poetry published in Germany was *Vom Sichersten ins Tausendste*. It appeared in 1969. Pastior's poetry is characterized by word play, elevated meaning and a tendency to bend the rules (*Oskar Pastior*). He won numerous awards for his works, including the Georg Büchner Prize in 2006, shortly after his death. Pastior and Müller had planned to write the novel *Atemschaukel* together, but he passed away before their collaboration was fully realized.

Müller used the notes that she and Pastior had drafted together to write the novel. *Atemschaukel* was published in 2009. The novel could fall under the category *postmemory* as proposed by Marianne Hirsch. A work of postmemory is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (Hirsch 22). Although the basis of the novel is the memories of Oskar Pastior and Herta Müller's mother, the text is considered a novel in genre, because it is written as fiction. As with Müller's other works, *Atemschaukel* is best categorized as *autofictional*. The protagonist of the novel, Leo Auberg, is based on Oskar Pastior. He is seventeen years old when he is sent to the labor camp. Throughout the course of the novel, Auberg contends with chronic hunger and difficult labor as well as homesickness and unfulfilled homosexual desires, homosexuality being at the time a legal offense punishable by imprisonment and certain death both in Romania and in the camps (Müller 9).

*Atemschaukel* is loosely chronological with occasional flashbacks, beginning with Auberg's summons to and packing for the Soviet forced labor camp. The novel then takes

the reader through Auberg's experiences in the camp and ends with his return home and a few episodes from his "present day" life. *Atemschaukel* is divided into numerous short chapters, each with a topical title. The book is told from the first-person perspective of Leo Auberg. Auberg relates his experiences at the forced labor camp in detail, often describing the people around him by name, by labor assignment and by physical characteristics.

Auberg's story and the content of the novel differ from Müller's previous works in many ways. With the exception of the very beginning and end, the events of the novel take place predominantly outside of Romania. The forced labor camp in the Ukraine is the setting of the novel. Unlike some of her previous novels, such as *Herztier* (1994), *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (1997), and *Reisende auf einem Bein* (1989), this novel does not derive directly from Müller's personal experiences. Instead she draws on Oskar Pastior's and her mother's experiences. Müller's works are "on the whole driven by totalitarianism," but in *Atemschaukel*, the experience of totalitarianism comes from a different source than in her other works (White 75).

Some aspects of Müller's works that remain the same in *Atemschaukel* are her themes and her use of poetic language. Contemporary scholars have identified the recurring themes in Müller's works as totalitarianism, trauma, memory, and *Heimat*. These themes have been discussed at length in the secondary literature. As one of her more recent works, *Atemschaukel* has not yet received critical attention comparable to her older works. Placing *Atemschaukel* in the context of contemporary scholarship and synthesizing the novel with previous scholarship provides a broader context for understanding Müller's recurrent themes and her aesthetics.

To some extent, Müller's *Atemschaukel* could be categorized as trauma literature. Trauma, as defined by Cathy Caruth, is "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). The experience of systematic starvation and forced manual labor are traumatic in their overwhelming nature and in the intrusive effects of chronic hunger that Auberg experiences long after he has left the camp. The current scholarship on the subject of trauma in Herta Müller's works is well represented in three main articles by scholars Brigid Haines, Beverly Eddy Driver and Lyn Marven. Their research focuses on texts other than *Atemschaukel*. To date, there is no current comparison of *Atemschaukel* to what has already been said about trauma in her other works. These three articles are useful for demonstrating how Müller's writing style in *Atemschaukel* belongs to the category of trauma narratives because of its fragmentation and repetition.

According to Brigid Haines in her 2002 article "'The Unforgettable Forgotten': The Traces of Trauma in Herta Müller's *Reisende auf einem Bein*," trauma is a metaphor for the postmodern condition and a metonym "for the topos of the unrepresentable and the unspeakable" (Haines 268). This same concept is identifiable in *Atemschaukel* in the way Müller represents the unrepresentable trauma of starvation and forced labor for protagonist Leo Auberg. Haines reads the protagonist in Müller's *Reisende auf einem Bein*, Irene, as a "traumatised individual, whose experience (in Ceaușescu's Romania, then as an ethnic German immigrant in West Berlin) is locatable, but the causes of whose trauma elude representation because they are not synthesisable into frameworks of understanding" (Haines 266). Haines concludes that the protagonist, Irene, is finally able

to exert agency (280). These traits are mirrored in Leo Auberg, whose experiences as a homosexual and as a labor camp inmate elude linguistic representation because they bring Auberg to the point of being thought of and treated as non-human and being treated as non-human. Asserting agency within a totalitarian context is seemingly a contradiction, but Auberg also asserts agency within the context of the labor camp. Auberg asserts agency by using the forced labor to combat the totalitarianism of chronic hunger.

The second article that provides insight into Müller's trauma narratives is Beverly Driver Eddy's 2000 article on *Herztier*, in which she states: "Müller skillfully blends "testimony and trauma narrative that illuminates the terrors of the Ceaușescu dictatorship and their lasting impact on its survivors" (Eddy 56). Although *Atemschaukel* is not about the Ceaușescu dictatorship, the novel does portray the lasting effects of the labor camp and near starvation on Leo Auberg, a victim of totalitarianism. Eddy argues that *Herztier* "makes clear, [that] neither testimony nor trauma narrative is able to heal or bring closure to the victims of the Romanian state terror" (56). This lack of closure to a victim of the forced labor camps is also apparent in the figure of Leo Auberg. At the end of *Atemschaukel*, he has returned to a "normal" life in his hometown. He even purchases notebooks and begins writing about his experiences in the labor camp. However, the closing lines of the novel depict his minute attention to the things he eats and his inability to forget the trauma he endured (Müller 297).

In the third article on trauma and Herta Müller's works, Lyn Marven addresses trauma and fragmentation in Müller's prose and collages. Marven's observations on the

fragmentation in Müller's style are crucial for also understanding *Atemschaukel* as a trauma narrative, in that Müller's style is consistently fragmented in this novel as well as in her previous works. Marven argues that both Müller's written texts and collages demonstrate trauma in the "texts' content, and also in the fragmentation which structures their linguistic and narrative syntax" (Marven 397). Müller's content is often not chronological and often contains gaps in the sequence of the story. *Atemschaukel* also demonstrates this fragmentation in the syntax used. Marven argues that "[t]rauma conceptualizes the psychological structures which are formed in response to extreme conditions, structures which affect perceptions of the body as well as use of language and the concept of narrative" (398). All three of these scholars' observations concerning Müller's earlier texts can be traced in *Atemschaukel*, making it a trauma narrative with unrepresentable trauma, lack of closure for victims of trauma, and fragmentation in both the context and syntax of Müller's texts. These three articles serve as a scholarly basis for common threads in Müller's works that are necessary for consideration before turning to the current reception of and scholarship on *Atemschaukel*.

The media-based reception of Müller's *Atemschaukel* has varied between positive and negative. In the 2009 pro and con articles in *Die Zeit* online, critics Michael Naumann and Iris Radisch debate whether *Atemschaukel* is "Kitsch oder Weltliteratur?" (zeit.de). Radisch argues that Lager literature should not be written from a secondhand perspective, and that Müller's book is "perfumed" and "overly scenic." Radisch further criticizes that Müller uses eighteenth-century language, meaning it is too flowery, and her intensive language is "abgeschmackt und formelhaft" (zeit.de). In contrast, Michael Naumann describes Müller's poetic language as "bewunderswert." Naumann claims that

the goal of Müller's writing is "Mitleid mit den Opfern zu erregen" (zeit.de). Naumann does not make a direct connection from the poetic language to his claim that the Müller's writing aims at eliciting sympathy for the victims. The articles are useful in drawing attention to the actual language and syntactical choices of *Atemschaukel*.

In an online review for *Die Welt* in 2009, Ruth Klüger, a Nazi extermination and labor camp survivor, also focuses on the poetic language of the book and its place in *Lager* literature. Klüger writes:

Die Kunst von "Atemschaukel" liegt darin, dass es sprachlich eine unnatürliche Zwangssituation zeichnet, in der der äußere wie der innere Mensch von Hunger, Ungeziefer, Heimweh – und das schließt Verlorenheit, Fremdsein ein – aufgefressen wird. Die Lager sind ja eine menschliche Grenzerfahrung, die wir in ihrer Andersartigkeit gern in einem Dachspeicher unseres kollektiven Gedächtnisses verstauben lassen.  
(www.welt.de)

The academic scholarship directly relating to *Atemschaukel* is not as prolific as for her other texts, due to the more recent publication date of the novel. This scholarship differs from the aforementioned book reviews in that it revolves around memory and *Heimat* (Buciuman), associations between objects and word to create personal identity (Schmidt), the novel's place in memory discourse and *Lager* discourse (Eke and Braun), and Müller's place within East-European literature (Renneke and Steinecke). Other scholarship addresses Müller's formulaic repetition and personification (Meurer) and ability with language (Bannasch and Bergmann).

Veronica Buciuman's 2012 article "'Mein Land riecht [...] wie das Essen meiner Mutter.' Heimatvision in Herta Müllers *Atemschaukel*" und in Aglaja Veteranyis "*Warum das Kind in der Polenta kocht*" discusses the concepts of *Heimat* in these two works as both "*Erinnerungsräume* and as *imaginary geographies*" (Buciuman 27). Buciuman discusses how Müller frequently associates memory with current experiences and current spaces with past experiences (32). She also argues that through memory and imagination, Auberg creates a "Lagerheimat" (33). For the purposes of this thesis, the discussion of *Heimat* is not particularly relevant, except in reference to Auberg's "hungering" for home.

Sarah Schmidt's 2012 article "Vom Kofferpacken. Zur fragilen Allianz der Dinge mit den Worten im Werk Herta Müllers" discusses Herta Müller's "poetische Reflexion über Dinge" as eine Reflexion über die Funktionsweisen von Wahrnehmungen" and "eine Reflexion über Sprache" (Schmidt 115). Schmidt looks at the connection of objects with words in Müller's essays and in *Atemschaukel*, particularly the central motif of packing a suitcase. Schmidt uses the opening chapters of *Atemschaukel*, in which Auberg describes his secret homosexuality as carrying "stilles Gepäck" to begin her analysis (123). Auberg has "[s]ich so tief und so lange ins Schweigen gepackt," he can't unpack himself with words. Schmidt argues that the packing and unpacking of suitcases is the same as packing and unpacking oneself. This focus on objects in *Atemschaukel* is relevant when considering what the Heart Shovel means for Auberg and how it functions in the novel.

Norbert Otto Eke's 2011 article on *Atemschaukel* places the novel within memory discourse. Müller personally holds that memory is a poetic construction that connects the past and present (Eke 58). This is in keeping with her theory of poetics, which is an "Erfinden der Wahrnehmung." He discusses how Müller's text does not qualify as a



memory text because it is a second hand novel. Eke states, "*Atemschaukel* ist kein historischer Roman, schon gar nicht . . . ein biografischer Roman" (59). Müller writes *Atemschaukel* as though it is the memory of protagonist Leo Auberg. Michael Braun's "Die Erfindung der Erinnerung: Herta Müllers *Atemschaukel*" also enters the novel into the memory discourse. Müller is "kein primärer Gedächtnisträger" and she goes one step further than "erfundene Wahrnehmung" with her "erfundene Erinnerung" (Braun 33). Braun claims that Müller's novel signals an aesthetic turn in German memory literature. He cites other texts that also narrate history, rather than reconstruct the past (34). Braun argues that there is a place for fiction within the genre of memory literature, and that this fiction begs the question, "wie 'wahr' und wie authentisch Erinnerungen überhaupt sein können" (41). Braun states that Müller's novel belongs to memory discourse (44). Braun sums up his argument:

*Atemschaukel* ist kein Dokumentarroman, kein historischer Roman, keine Autobiografie und kein Werk kollektiver Autorschaft, sondern ein Roman, der den ästhetischen Umgang mit der Erinnerung an Deportation und Lagererfahrung thematisiert. Herta Müller hat diese Geschichte nicht selbst erlebt, aber aufgrund intensiver Zeitzeugengespräche sozusagen nacherinnert. (48)

Eke and Braun's research on the role of memory in writing the novel, is relevant in considering the narrative voice of *Atemschaukel*. The novel reads as though Auberg is recounting his personal experiences. Müller is more distanced from the protagonist in this novel than in her previous works, because the experiences are not something she personally endured.

In direct contrast to the scholarship on memory, Petra Renneke's 2010 article "'Eine kleine Kunstmaschine': Poesie und Politik in der Prosa Herta Müllers und Oskar Pastiors" states that *Atemschaukel* is not about real or false memory, but rather Müller's approach and poetic language (Renneke 704). Renneke turns the focus of the dialogue about *Atemschaukel* back to the novel's aesthetics. She argues that Müller's poetic language is in keeping with the tradition of East-European literature and culture (707). Renneke locates both Müller's poetic prose and Pastior's poetry within the realm of East-European surrealism (710). Another reading of *Atemschaukel* focuses on the background information that led to its writing. In his 2011 article "Herta Müller: *Atemschaukel* Ein Roman vom 'Nullpunkt der Existenz,'" Hartmut Steinecke gives some historical background information about the Romanian-Germans that were deported to Soviet forced labor camps. With a similar focus to Renneke, Steinecke reads the novel within a historical and cultural context. He directly quotes Müller's mother from other texts in which she compared hunger, snow and cold (17). Steinecke also gives biographical information on Pastior and his desire to write about the camp experiences and dehumanization of individuals until "Nullpunkt der Existenz" (21). This context for the novel is important in considering the novel's audience and the importance of location for understanding Auberg as a person. However, the context alone is not enough to fully understand *Atemschaukel*. Steinecke purports this idea, when he turns from the factual information about the novel, to some of the novel's aesthetics. He mentions "wie Kunst zur Gegenkraft wird" in the novel, as well as Müller's two main metaphors, the Hunger Angel and the Heart Shovel (23, 25). He gives examples of these two metaphors, but

offers no insights into their meaning. The meaning and function of Müller's metaphors are critical to *Atemschaukel*.

The remaining three articles move from the external discourses of memory and *Heimat* to the actual language used in the novel. In her article "Diktatorisches Erzählen: Formelhaftigkeit bei Herta Müller," Petra Meurer states that the main focus of research on Herta Müller is on her "formulierte Eigenart im Erzählen" (Meurer 177). In contrast to the review by Radisch, who claims that Müller's formulaic writing is "perfumed," Meurer argues that "alle Stilmittel werden nur für die Darstellung von Macht und Gewalt und damit (indirekt) zur Kritik an der Diktatur eingesetzt" (178). Meurer claims that Müller's purpose in her language is to criticize totalitarianism.

Bettina Bannasch and Christian Bergmann also address Müller's language and the role of language, but instead of seeing language as directed against a dictator, they see it as the ability or inability to communicate trauma for the individual and as part of the discourse of the camps. This topic hearkens back to Marven's article and the effect of trauma on syntax and language (Marven 397). In Bannasch's 2011 article "Zero - A Gaping Mouth: The Discourse of the Camps in Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel*" addresses the "zero point" or "Nullpunkt" that the camp inmate reaches within *Atemschaukel*. Bannasch argues that *Atemschaukel* belongs to a politically relevant ethic moreso than to traumatic narration (Bannasch 116). She states that Müller emphasizes the inability of language or artistic attempt to "give expression to the memory of the camp" (117). This statement contradicts Bergmann's 2011 article, "Das Unsagbare sagen: Metapher, Symbol und Allegorie in Herta Müllers Roman *Atemschaukel*," in which he claims that Müller does find a way to say the unsayable. Christian Bergmann analyses Müller's text

linguistically by presenting the limitations within which Müller worked in order to describe chronic hunger: "Für die Endlichkeit dieses Leidens hält das sprachliche System nur eine endliche Zahl von Mitteln bereit," and by then arguing that Müller overcomes this linguistic limitation through her use of metaphor, symbol and allegory (Bergmann 220). Bergmann's article gives every page reference that the Hunger Angel appears on and discusses the different attributes of the Hunger Angel. His article analyzes the Hunger Angel in Müller's novel, but he does not argue for what the Hunger Angel means in the text or for how it functions in the novel.

I aim to take Bergmann's argument that Müller overcomes linguistic limitation through use of poetic language one step further and demonstrate how Müller not only uses metaphor, symbol and allegory to overcome linguistic limitations of expressing suffering, but also how she uses these poetic devices to describe suffering, to represent more than just hunger or labor. Though the fields of trauma and memory theory appear more frequently in literature about *Atemschaukel* and provide an excellent theoretical and geographical context in which to locate the novel, my thesis focuses on Müller's style and the aesthetics of the novel. I address her use of metaphors and how they function for Leo Auberg.

The two traumatic experiences in the camp are associated with his chronic hunger and forced manual labor. Throughout the course of the novel, Müller uses several metaphors as she repeatedly describes these traumas and introduces the reader to further aspects of hunger and labor. Indeed, even the title of the novel is a metaphor.

*Atemschaukel* is a neologism Müller created and does not have a standard equivalent when translated into English. The word means "breath swing" and refers to the specific

way that Auberg breathes when he is performing his manual labor. Metaphors bring the reader closer to the experience of the forced labor camp because of their ability to create new mappings and new connotations. Auberg could say, "I was so hungry, I never thought of anything else, except my hunger." The concepts of "hunger" and "hungry" mean something to the reader, but the extent of his hunger is better understood when he introduces the reader to the ever-present Hunger Angel. Auberg could say, "The manual labor was exhausting, but it kept my mind off my hunger." Instead he calls his tool for shoveling coal the Heart Shovel, and compares the monotonous movements of shoveling to the fine arts of dancing and fencing. Metaphors are central to understanding the traumas represented in the novel.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY METAPHOR THEORY AND HERTA MÜLLER'S USE OF METAPHOR IN *ATEMSCHAUKEL*

Before looking at the specific metaphors used in *Atemschaukel*, it is helpful to discuss the term "metaphor" more generally. In this chapter I present a brief discussion of current theories of metaphor as well as the definition of metaphor that I have chosen for my thesis.

All words have a place within mental mapping of meaning. For example the word *bus* may make one think of its connection to school or of its yellow color or of emotions such as fear or excitement that come from past experiences of riding on the bus. The word *hunger* may normally be associated with the stomach as the place where the sensation of hunger originates or with the physical discomfort that hunger can cause or with food as the solution to hunger. Metaphor works cognitively to establish connections, associations, or comparisons between one object/idea and another object/idea. Oftentimes these two objects or ideas can seem unrelated, but by using one (A) to describe the other (B), a new understanding can be made of B. This is how Müller operates in *Atemschaukel*. Her use of poetic language relates the main concepts of hunger and labor to seemingly unrelated words in order to create deeper meaning and understanding and in order to communicate one human's experience, Leo Auberg's, in a manner lends greater experience than a simple non-poetic narration would be. Her craft and the power of her language lie in her skill in creating new mappings and new connections.

"The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," George Lakoff presents the classical theory of metaphor: "instances of novel poetic language in which words like *mother*, *go*, and *night* are not used in their normal everyday senses" (Lakoff 202). Metaphor was traditionally considered a "matter of language not thought" in contrast to contemporary theories of metaphor which sees metaphor as "mappings across conceptual domains" and the "way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (204). Lakoff is often cited for taking metaphor scholarship from the realm of language to the cognitive realm. Kövecses builds on Lakoff's theory of mental domain mapping and presents the benefits of additional contemporary theories.

In his lengthy article "Recent Developments in Metaphor Theory" Zoltán Kövecses discusses the theory of metaphor as six different theories: "categorization, standard conceptual metaphor theory, blending theory, the neural theory of metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory as based on the idea of main meaning focus, and relevance theory" (11). The categorization view of metaphor is when the metaphor is "assigned to a category that is exemplified by or typical of another entity also belonging to that category" (12). Standard conceptual metaphor theory maintains that there is a source domain evoked by one word and a target domain evoked by the compared word. Simply put, this theory proposes simple "source-to-target" mappings (13). Blending theory takes standard conceptual metaphor theory and argues that in addition to a source and a target, there is a third realm where the characteristics of the source and target are blended. The neural theory of metaphor comes from Lakoff's theory of metaphors being located within cognitive realms and mental domains. The conceptual metaphor theory is characterized by "main meaning focus" and the notion of central knowledge within a given speech

community. The majority of a language community and speech community would associate a main meaning with given words. Relevance theory portrays metaphor as an inferential process that equivocates the source and target, and creates a "category with a property for all individuals with that property" (22). Relevance theory is very similar to blending theory. All of these theories have the fundamental concept of metaphor at their core. They all purport the conveying of meaning, whether linguistic or cognitive, from one entity onto another.

A metaphor is the comparison of two words or concepts, in which "the source concept acquires a new meaning focus against the background of the target concept" (Kövecses 22). For the purpose of my thesis on Herta Müller's use of metaphor in *Atemschaukel*, I shall use this definition.

Before looking at Müller's metaphors in *Atemschaukel*, it is beneficial to discuss what has already been written about Müller's use of metaphor in her other texts. In her article "Metapher, Metonymie und Moral. Herta Müllers *Herztier*" Ricarda Schmidt points out that in *Herztier*, Müller's metaphors narrow down meaning, rather than open up meaning. This implies that Müller's metaphors are specifically related to the contexts of her texts and have a specific meaning for her and for her texts. In his review of *Atemschaukel*, Michael Laumann writes:

Es ist die sachgebannte Genauigkeit, mit der Herta Müllers poetische, zugleich aber buchhalterisch präzise Aufzählung der kleinsten Habseligkeiten des Lagerlebens die beklemmende Lektüre auf paradoxe Weise erträglich macht. Das liegt an der Kunstfertigkeit ihrer bildersatten Sprache; sie ist bewundernswert. Und wenn sich die Frage stellt, ob es



denn richtig sei, das Elend in schönster Prosa widerzuspiegeln, dann hat diese Prosa ihr ernstes Ziel im Herzen der Leser schon erreicht – nämlich Mitleid mit den Opfern zu erregen. (www.zeit.de)

In her 2001 article "Stilistische Paradigmen und literarische Verfahren im Werk Herta Müllers" Graziella Prediou claims that Müller "versucht sich durch Sprache ästhetische Freiräume zu schaffen, sich dem Totalitarismus zu entziehen" (162). Similarly, in her 1998 article "'Leben wir im Detail': Herta Müller's Micro-Politics of Resistance" Brigid Haines argues that Müller's novelist prose allows the reader creative space (Haines 117). When commenting on Müller's style of repetition, Haines stated, "one of the most characteristic of Müller's narrative strategies is to invest observed, remembered or invented details with metonymic significance and repeat them, thus creating homologizing metaphorical patterns" (Haines 116-117). This statement accurately describes Müller's writing style in *Atemschaukel*. Müller's "focus on detail . . . originated for Müller as both an aesthetic strategy and basic survival mechanism in the face of the life-denying master plots of totalitarianism" (109). Müller imposes this focus on detail as a survival mechanism onto Auberg as the narrator of *Atemschaukel*. Auberg's focus on detail and use of metaphor to describe his experiences are indeed a mechanism for surviving the labor camp. Auberg is not just a survivor. More so than aesthetic freedom, creative space and survival in the face of totalitarianism, metaphor allows Auberg agency in the face of totalitarian oppression.

In the same way that Müller strategizes on a political level, she also strategizes on an artistic level. Müller refuses totality of oppression through her writing and language. This refusal is projected on Leo Auberg. In my thesis I argue that Müller's metaphors of

hunger and labor in *Atemschaukel* not only depict the horrors of the forced labor camp, but also offer a way for protagonist Leo Auberg to retain agency through language in the face of the trauma he experiences. Specifically, the following two chapters present Auberg's metaphors of hunger and labor in the camp and what they represent for him.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE EXPRESSION OF CHRONIC DESIRE: METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF HUNGER IN *ATEMSCHAUKELE*

Metaphorical representations of hunger dominate all experiences in the camp and accordingly metaphors of hunger dominate Auberg's narrative. Auberg presents numerous characteristics of hunger throughout the novel. His language choices map new meanings onto the concept of hunger, resulting in new connotations and a deeper understanding of hunger in the labor camps. Auberg begins with the metaphor of hunger as a Hunger Angel.

Hunger dominates his choices in the camp and it dominates his memory of the camp after he has left. Instead of being confined to its own chapters, fourteen and twenty-eight, which are titled after the creature, the Hunger Angel spreads its wings throughout the entire book. This mirrors the characteristics of the Hunger Angel and how he infiltrates every part of Auberg's mind and body. Hunger is an everyday human experience and can be described in everyday language, but the hunger brought by the Hunger Angel is uncommon to the everyday human experience and therefore cannot be described in everyday language. The Hunger Angel requires both prose and the poetic language of metaphors in order for its power to be understood and in order for him to have a small measure of the effect he had on Auberg.

Through her many metaphors, Müller portrays the Hunger Angel as being omnipresent. Auberg compares the Hunger Angel's actions to sleeping, weighing and

calculating. He portrays the many roles of the Hunger Angel as an adversary, a master, a usurper, a sexual being, a teacher, a thief and a lawyer, a savior, and an occupying foreign power. In all of these roles, the main characteristic that all can be categorized under is that the Hunger Angel stands for intense longing or chronic desire. This desire is so strong that it overrides any emotional bonds, including marital relationships, such as when one husband in the camp is so hungry, he eats his wife's food and she eventually starves to death.

Instead of being an external force that tortures Leo Auberg, the Hunger Angel is a creature coming from within. The Hunger Angel does not originate with the Russians, he emerges as the intense and chronic desire of the individual. This desire reveals itself in the setting of the labor camp.

The term Hunger Angel seems contradictory in itself. Hunger has a more negative connotation, whereas an "angel," in a biblical sense, typically connotes a supernatural being who is a messenger, a guardian, or in the instance of the Death Angel, death. The Hunger Angel in *Atemschaukel* embodies some of these attributes. While ever present like a guardian angel, he is an oppressive and almost diabolical figure. The Hunger Angel is also an angel of death, as many of his victims in the labor camp die. He is controlling and he is something that Auberg appears to fight against, often for literal, physical control of his physical body.

The Hunger Angel personifies the force of chronic hunger, or as I argue, the force of chronic desire, in the labor camp. His hunger in the camp is so consuming, that Auberg treats it like a separate entity from himself by creating another being to personify hunger. The Hunger Angel is also a narrative force in Herta Müller's novel, as he appears more

frequently than any other metaphor and gains meaning through its numerous incarnations throughout the novel. Each mention of the Hunger Angel introduces a new attribute. When compounded with previous characteristics of earlier chapters, the Hunger Angel appears to be growing in meaning and strength.

In the first chapter of *Atemschaukel*, the Hunger Angel appears only once and without introduction. The chapter details Auberg packing for the labor camp and his transportation there. As Auberg is packing, his grandmother tells him, "ICH WEISS DU KOMMST WIEDER" (Müller 14). Auberg believes that his grandmother's sentence "wurde zum Komplizen der Herzschaufel und zum Kontrahenten des Hungerengels" (14). This sentence has the power to keep him alive and carry him through the ordeal ahead. Auberg does not explain the Hunger Angel nor does he give him more attention than this passing reference. But it is clear that his grandmother's words represent life and the Hunger Angel is its adversary, death. This initial mention of the Hunger Angel shows that Auberg needs something to combat the strength of the Hunger Angel. Later on, we see that his primary weapon against the Hunger Angel is the forced labor in the camp, the "accomplice" to his grandmother's words, is the Heart Shovel. (see Chapter 4)

Not only is the Hunger Angel an adversary, but hunger leads Auberg to certain places and makes him perform actions that are otherwise unnatural for Auberg. In the chapter titled "Vom Hungerengel" Auberg describes the Hunger Angel as a master. The role of the Hunger Angel as master is seen in how Auberg eats inhumanely, which would be beneath the Hunger Angel. The Hunger Angel has the ability to make him behave in a more animalistic fashion when he searches for food and when he eats it: "Meine Gier ist roh, meine Hände sind wild" und "wie schnell hab ich dann mit hochgezogener Lippe alle

gefrorenen Kartoffelschalen gegessen" (88). In this passage the Hunger Angel also maintains a certain dignity that he does not allow its victims. The Hunger Angel would never stoop to the rubbish pile to eat potato peels: "Abfall fasst der Engel nicht an" (88). The unrelenting nature of the Hunger Angel is reflected in the unrelenting manner with which Auberg eats the discarded potato peels "[o]hne Unterlass": "Eine Schale gleich hinter die andere in den Mund geschoben, ohne Lücke wie der Hunger" (88).

In this same chapter, Auberg also portrays the Hunger Angel as a creature with scales to weigh something. The Hunger Angel finds Leo Auberg not light enough (87). Auberg responds, "Du betrügst mich mit meinem Fleisch. Es ist dir verfallen. Aber ich bin nicht mein Fleisch. Ich bin etwas anderes und lasse nicht locker. . . . Was ich bin, betrügt deine Waage" (87). In order to escape from the control of the Hunger Angel, Auberg allows the Heart Shovel to be his master. When his mind wanders from the task of shoveling coal, and the Hunger Angel begins to creep in, Auberg fights back with his very essence. What he *is* is stronger than the Hunger Angel and he is not the Hunger Angel's slave. "Von Wer bin ich kann nicht mehr die Rede sein, aber ich sag dir nicht, was ich bin" (87). This is one of the first passages which indicates that Auberg has the ability to resist the oppression of the Hunger Angel.

The Hunger Angel begins with the power of an adversary and master. Then his power increases as he has the ability to weigh individual inmates and make them lighter and lighter. His realm of power also extends to the sleep of the inmates. Müller portrays sleeping through a metaphor of eating: "Ich esse einen kurzen Schlaf, dann wache ich auf und esse den nächsten kurzen Schlaf. Ein Traum ist wie der andere, es wird gegessen" (89). The inmates cannot help but dream of eating: "Der Schlaf bleibt dünn, je mehr ich

esse, und der Hunger wird nie müde" (89). Müller uses the imagery of eating bits of sleep to portray the pervasive nature of hunger. At this point in the novel, the Hunger Angel is moving from the realm of the physical into the realm of the mind.

There are several passages in *Atemschaukel* in which Auberg describes his thoughts and feelings of home and his homesickness. In the chapter titled "Wer hat das Land ausgetauscht" Auberg reduces his thoughts of homesickness to bodily sensations: "Dann ist mein Heimweh nur der Hunger nach dem Ort, wo ich früher einmal satt war" (191). In this passage Auberg longs to return home and his hunger displaces this longing. However, he's not actually longing for home and for family. There is no emotional tie to his home. The systematic starvation of the labor camp has dehumanized Auberg's associations with this place called home. Instead he is longing for fullness, for an escape from hunger, for a place where hunger was not plaguing him everyday all day long. He hungers for the idea of home, a place of fullness, and hunger is used as a substitute term for longing. This is one of the first instances in the novel, where hunger is used as a metaphor for longing in general. It is not merely a word that connotes a desire and need for food.

Once the Hunger Angel has possessed the body and mind of his victim, he demonstrates his supernatural power. In the chapter, "Von der Herzschaufel," in which Auberg describes the Heart Shovel and the rhythmic motion of shoveling, Auberg also elaborates on the Hunger Angel. In this section of *Atemschaukel*, the Hunger Angel takes on supernatural qualities such as his unusual size, ability to multiply and his omnipresence. In his article "Das Unsagbare sagen" Christian Bergmann alludes to this supernatural nature of the Hunger Angel, when he quotes from the chapter, "Der

gutgläubige und der skeptische Flacon." Bergmann cites the passage, in which the Hunger Angel "verlor jedes Maß, wuchs an einem Tag so viel, wie kein Gras in einem ganzen Sommer und kein Schnee in einem ganzen Winter" (158). The Hunger Angel grows to an unnatural size, thereby becoming something supernatural (Bergmann 221). Müller describes the Hunger Angel as immeasurable and losing all proportion (158). The Hunger Angel had the supernatural ability not only to grow in size but also in number. In the chapter, "Von der Herzschaufel," Auberg describes the Hunger Angel in terms of mathematics. He is unsure whether there is just one Hunger Angel, or if one exists for each person. The thought of multiple Hunger Angels is horrifying because "Wenn jeder seinen eigenen Hungerengel hat, dann wird jedesmal, wenn einer stirbt, ein Hungerengel frei" (85). This fear appears again when the lawyer's wife, Heidrun Gast, dies, and Auberg fears that her Hunger Angel is weighing him and will move on to him (225).

In "Von der Herzschaufel" the Hunger Angel's supernatural ability is portrayed in his being everywhere and in his knowledge of Auberg. The Hunger Angel is omnipresent. He exists "in der Kohle, in der Herzschaufel, in den Gelenken" (84). He exists in the shoveler, the shovel and the thing being shoveled, in all three participants of the act of shoveling. In the chapter titled "Vom Hungerengel," the Hunger Angel "geht nicht weg, kommt aber wieder" and "fehlt nie" (91). The Hunger Angel also "kennt meine Grenzen, weiß meine Herkunft und seine Wirkung" (91).

Another power that the Hunger Angel possesses is the command over the individual's sexual desires including his ability to neutralize the inmates' sex, so that he can fully control them. Men and women are "nicht zu unterscheiden und geschlechtlich stillgestellt" (158). The Hunger Angel has the ability to neuter individuals. Since these



people "füreinander geschlechtslos waren, paarte sich der Hungerengel mit jedem" (159). This act of the Hunger Angel "coupling" with the inmates is a very intimate act. The verb suggests that the Hunger Angel knows the inmates intimately. These half-starved human beings are neither masculine nor feminine, but are "objektiv neutral wie Objekte -- wahrscheinlich sächlich" (158). Instead of being the subject and the actor of one's own life, the Hunger Angel reduces people to mere genderless objects.

Though Auberg does not mention this, nor even suggest it, at this point of the novel, the Hunger Angel's power over the inmates' sex is a telling observation of Auberg's given his earlier professed homosexuality and his knowledge of the danger that such a profession could bring. Even in this context where the inmates are sexless and have nothing left to hide, Auberg still has something to hide. In a way, although Auberg is as sexless as the other inmates, he maintains more agency than they do because his secret is not visibly touchable by the Hunger Angel.

In this same chapter, the Hunger Angel is portrayed as a usurper of human power. The inmates' ability to act and decide, their very autonomy, has been usurped by hunger. Auberg states that "alles, was ich tat, hatte Hunger" (158). Even his sense of smell has been overtaken by the Hunger Angel. Every place in the camp and in the village smelled of food:

Der Lagerkorso roch nach Karamell, der Lagereingang nach frischgeba[c]kenem Brot, das Überqueren der Straße vom Lager zu Fabrik nach warmen Aprikosen, der Holzzaun der Fabrik nach kandierten Nüssen, der Fabrikeingang nach Rührei, die Jama nach gedünstetem Paprika, die Schlacke der Abraumhalden nach Tomatensuppe, der

Kühlturm nach gebratenen Auberginen, das Labyrinth der dampfenden Rohre nach Vanillestrudel. Die Teerklumpen im Unkraut rochen nach Quittenkompott und die Koks Batterien nach Zuckermelonen. (159)

The Hunger Angel accompanies the inmates everywhere they go and he tortures them. Auberg describes these smells as simultaneously "Zauber" and "Qual" (159). The Hunger Angel has the ability to take the everyday existence in the camp and turn it into memories of food, in order to torture the inmates.

The Hunger Angel's power extends over the body and the mind. His power is also stronger than the human desire for sex and the societal bond of marriage. In the chapter titled "Löffel hin Löffel her" Auberg relates the story of a husband and a wife, named Paul and Heidrun Gast, in the camp. Each time the inmates are eating, the husband sits next to his wife and takes spoonfuls of soup from her bowl (221). In the following chapter titled "Einmal war mein Hungerengel Advokat" in which the narration of this husband and wife continues, Müller describes the Hunger Angel as "doch selber ein Dieb" (224). The Hunger Angel is the only one who could stop Paul Gast, who was formerly a lawyer, from stealing his wife's soup. The Hunger Angels all know each other and "Alle haben unsere Berufe" (224). The Hunger Angel is not just a thief, but also a lawyer, because Paul Gast is a lawyer. As a lawyer, the Hunger Angel is calculating what he can get from his victims. Auberg states that Heidrun Gast's Hunger Angel "beim Essen rechnete, wie viel an mir in welcher Zeit zu holen ist" (225). This chapter echoes Auberg's fear from an earlier chapter, that, once their victim was "light enough" and died, the Hunger Angels would move on to another inmate and begin weighing him or her. Müller uses these metaphors of occupation to convey an additional negative aspect of the

Hunger Angel: that he is as cold and calculating as a lawyer and as inconsiderate and selfish as a thief. The Hunger Angel is not only supernatural in his ability, but he also embodies all the basest characteristics of humanity.

Continuing this same metaphor of possession and occupation, Auberg states, "Und der eigene Hunger ist für jeden eine fremde Macht" (229). Hunger occupies a person in the same way that one country can occupy another country. The Hunger Angel's power extends from the constraints of the labor camp and he accompanies Leo Auberg throughout his life.

In the chapter titled "Vom Lagerglück" Auberg describes how his hunger maintains a lasting effect on him even sixty years later. Auberg again describes his hunger as surpassing that feeling of needing food. Hunger also describes any intense sensation, feeling or thought that Auberg experiences: "Seit meiner Heimkehr hat jedes Gefühl an jedem Tag seinen eigenen Hunger" (248). Hunger is a metaphor for longing and intense emotion. Hunger, as longing, is the strongest part of his memory as well as the strongest part of his life after the camp, because everything he does still centers around his many desires. One of these desires that he keeps, is the desire for food and satiation. In the chapter titled "Vom Lagerglück" Auberg describes different types of happiness. The two types of happiness that he is most familiar with are mouth happiness and head happiness. Mouth happiness is achieved when an individual is able to eat and for a moment forget his/her hunger. Mouth happiness

kommt beim Essen und ist kürzer als der Mund, sogar als das Wort Mund.

Wenn man es ausspricht, hat es keine Zeit, in den Kopf zu steigen. Das

Mundglück will gar nicht, dass man darüber spricht. Wenn ich vom

Mundglück rede, müsste ich vor jedem Satz PLÖTZLICH sagen. Und nach jedem Satz: DU SAGST ES NIEMANDEM, WEIL ALLE HUNGRIG SIND. (245)

Following this description, Auberg lists all the different weeds and plants that he picks and eats in order to achieve this sudden moment of mouth happiness, when he's able to forget his hunger. Auberg still experiences mouth happiness even years later when he is no longer in the camp:

Für mich ist das Essen auch 60 Jahre nach dem Lager eine große Erregung. Ich esse mit allen Poren. wenn ich mit anderen Personen esse, werde ich unangenehm. Ich esse rechthaberisch. Die anderen kennen das Mundglück nicht, sie essen gesellig und höflich. Mir aber geht gerade beim Essen das Eintropfenzuvielglück durch den Kopf, dass es zu jedem, so wie wir hier sitzen, irgendwann kommt und dass man im Kopf das Nest im Atem die Schaukel, in der Brust die Pumpe, im Bauch den Wartesaal hergeben muss. Ich esse so gerne, dass ich nicht sterben will, weil ich dann nicht mehr essen kann. Ich weiß seit 60 Jahren, dass meine Heimkehr das Lagerglück nicht bändigen konnte. Es beißt mit seinem Hunger heute noch von jedem anderen Gefühl die Mitte ab. (237)

Hunger cannot be confined to Auberg's experience in the camp, it also exists for him outside the camp, after his experiences are "over."

In the chapter titled "Man lebt, man lebt nur einmal" Auberg describes the last year in the camp when the inmates were given cash for their work. With this money they could buy food and clothing. The inmates became nourished and "wurden wieder Männer

und Frauen, als wäre es die zweite Pubertät" (250). Hunger takes away sexual identity (159) and then nourishment returns it to the inmates. Now that the inmates are no longer plagued by chronic hunger, they are able to turn their attention to new desires. The hunger for food is replaced by a hunger for new fashions (250). Here Müller shows again that hunger is not only a longing for food, but also a general metaphor for longing. Later on in the chapter, Auberg describes the soaps and powders that the women purchased. Because of the colors and the smells, "Der Hungerengel staunte" (251). The Hunger Angel is a powerful, supernatural being, but here the Hunger Angel seems less like a being that is plaguing the inmates from without. Instead the Hunger Angel is internalized within each inmate. When Auberg obtains rubber for new, lighter shoes, the Hunger Angel also becomes "leichtfüßig" (251). When a master tailor repaired or sewed clothes for the inmates, the Hunger Angel ran around "leichtsinnig" (252). Each of these descriptions demonstrates that the Hunger Angel does not simply stand for chronic hunger, but also for chronic desire.

As mentioned above in his review of the novel, Michael Laumann states that the goal of the novel is "nämlich Mitleid mit den Opfern zu erregen." If this were the only goal of the novel, it has definitely been achieved. But more than provoking empathy and more than locating the novel within the contexts of memory, trauma or *Lager* literature, the novel is significant for the individual by giving the individual a voice through metaphor.

In addition to maintaining his hunger and his strange manner of eating when he returns home, Auberg maintains his unfulfilled sexual desire. Müller relates Auberg's failed marriage and his failed attempts at relationships with other men in the chapter titled

"Ich bin noch immer das Klavier." At one point Auberg attempts to be affectionate with another young man from the crate factory, but is repulsed (285). Although Auberg's desires are aroused on numerous occasions, "Die Dringlichkeit der Gier und Niedertracht des Glücks ist längst eine andere Zeit, wenn auch mein Hirn sich noch auf Schritt und Tritt verführen lässt" (291).

Auberg also begins writing after he has returned home. Writing is a way for Auberg to express and cope with the traumatic experiences of the labor camp. In the chapter titled "Diktandohefte" Auberg is describing his writing process from when he first purchased notebooks and began writing down his experiences in the camp. When he reaches the section about the Hunger Angel, he describes the Hunger Angel as his savior. He writes: "Beim Hungerengel kam ich ins Schwärmen, als hätte er mich nur gerettet, nicht gequält" (283). This passage could be read as Auberg's pleasure in having the literary vehicle to convey chronic hunger in the labor camp.

At the end of the novel, Auberg states that "Seit dem Hungerengel erlaube ich niemandem, mich zu besitzen" (295). This statement implies demonstrates Auberg's assertion of agency by the end of the novel. As mentioned before, Lyn Marven argues that the protagonist in *Reisende auf einem Bein* asserts her agency in the midst of totalitarianism. Similarly, Auberg asserts his agency here. If it is true that, as I have demonstrated, the Hunger Angel represents chronic desire, then for the novel as a whole this means that *Atemschaukel* can also be read in terms of the individual's desires and agency, and not simply in terms of collective experience under totalitarian rule. The shovel, which was issued by the Russians for shoveling coal, and his use of language become Auberg's tools against the totalitarianism of chronic hunger, or chronic desire.

## CHAPTER 4

METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LABOR IN *ATEMSCHAUKELE*:

## AUBERG'S AGENCY

Chronic hunger, or chronic desire is complemented in *Atemschaukel* by imagery reflecting different forms of labor in the camp Auberg is imprisoned in. Auberg's assignments range from loading and unloading bricks from wagons, to shoveling coal, to carrying and mixing cement for building. This imagery of building and repetitive or cyclical work reflects the way Müller structured her text. Her metaphors and her descriptions and redescriptions of subjects such as hunger and labor mirror the labor that goes on in the camp. Auberg labors to build and Müller labors to portray these major themes in all aspects and detail.

Besides the Hunger Angel, Müller created another prominent term, when she named the shovel Auberg uses for shoveling coal in the camp the Heart Shovel (*Herzschaufel*) (82). The name is derived from the heart-shaped blade of the shovel. The Heart Shovel is associated with rhythm and swinging, in the same way that Auberg describes the seesaw motion of his breath in his chest (82). His breath is a method of internal balance and the Heart-Shovel is a method of external balance. It provides rhythm and balance for his daily life in the camp and it provides a physical balance, "ein zweites äußeres Gleichgewicht," for his physical body as he endures monotonous physical labor

(82). For Auberg, shoveling coal with the Heart Shovel is entirely different than his prior task of loading bricks.

Beim Ziegelaufladen hat man nur seine Hände, es geht um die Logistik.  
Aber beim Kohleabladen macht das Werkzeug, die Herzschaufel, die  
Logistik zur Artistik. Kohleabladen, das ist vornehmster Sport, wie kaum  
das Reiten, kaum das Kunstspringen, kaum das elegante Tennis. Wie  
Eiskunstlauf. Ich und die Schaufel sind ein Paarlauf, konnte man sagen.  
Wer einmal seine Herzschaufel gehabt hat, der wird von ihr mitgerissen.  
(Müller 83)

Working with his hands to unload bricks and loading coal with a shovel are both forms of physical labor. However, the addition of the tool for the one task turns the movement of shoveling and loading coal into something artistic.

In the same way in which the Heart Shovel changes the meaning of manual labor, so too does Müller's poetic language bring a new voice to the narration of labor camp experiences. Meurer argues that Müller's metaphors accomplish a critique of a dictator. I would add that Müller's metaphors give the victim a voice. Loading bricks and loading coal are both manual labor, but the means of manual labor, the Heart Shovel, make one of them artistic and therefore more closely tied to the emotional part of personal experience. Writing about experience in plain, direct language and writing about experience in poetic language are both forms of writing and communicating. However, communicating through means of metaphor, symbol and allegory make the second form of writing more artistic, and, in a way, more compelling as there is a natural human emotional connection to poetic and artistic language.



Müller portrays forced labor as a way to take some control and power away from the Hunger Angel. Both metaphors are connected to the notion of labor. Just as Auberg describes hunger as being dependent on the Heart-Shovel, so too are these terms dependent on one another in the novel. The Hunger Angel is so powerful, it requires an adversary. The manual labor associated with the Heart Shovel and the cement is so strenuous, it needs to be assigned some value in order to be bearable. Manual labor is exhausting and purposeless, when it is forced. But when manual labor is a means of combatting an adversary, it takes on personal significance.

In the fourteenth chapter, titled "Vom Hungerengel," Auberg describes his job of shoveling coal in the camp. Auberg states that he does not need the shovel, "aber mein Hunger ist auf sie angewiesen" (86). This dependency on the shovel comes from Auberg's need to escape the Hunger Angel. Auberg explains that, "wenn ich fürs Brot schaufle, bin ich abgelenkt vom Hunger" (86). Auberg needs the Heart-Shovel in order to escape from the mastery of the Hunger Angel, but the Heart Shovel is also a master. "Ich wünschte, die Herzschaufel wäre mein Werkzeug. Aber sie ist mein Herr. Das Werkzeug bin ich" (86). This dependency is trifold. The Hunger Angel and Heart Shovel depend upon one another as adversaries, and the narrator depends on these two metaphors as a means of expressing his trauma narrative.

In the same chapter, "Von der Herzschaufel," in which Auberg describes the shovel he uses for coal, he also describes the movements involved in shoveling as "in einem wiegenden Schwungrhythmus" (83). In the two pages that Müller uses to write about the act of shoveling, she uses both imagery and the cadence of her word choice and

syntax to depict the shoveling accurately. Müller compares it to dancing and fencing. Her phrasing and sentences match the rhythm of the task:

Du stichst die Kante schief ab, . . . packst mit der linken Hand, . . . [d]ann von links oben die Kohle abstechen, . . . in einem Bogen abwärtsziehen bis zum Rand und sie im selben Schwung. . . . Dann die Schaufel leer zurück, links hinauf. Und wieder Schwung und dann die Schaufel wieder vollgeladen rechts hinunter. . . . Rechter Fuß graziös nach vorn, linker Fuß als Stützachse stabil nach hinten, Zehen leicht auswärts gedreht. Dann die linke Hand am Querholz, die rechte Hand diesmal nicht tief. . . . Nun stichst du ein, hilfst mit dem rechten Knie nach, ziehst zurück, (83-84)

Müller describes the repetition of movements as steps one takes with one's feet and the proper placement of one's hands on the shovel and the way the shovel moves and slides through the hands as the same as dancing movements (84). She directly compares it to the Tango, "wechselnd spitzwinklig bei gleichbleibendem Takt" (84). She also describes these carefully engineered movements as fencing (83, 84). Every motion is made up of angles and specific movements (84). The comparison with fencing also connotes the actions of attacking and defending. Auberger is attacking his hunger by engrossing himself in his task and thereby he is also defending himself from the ever-present Hunger Angel. These two images of shoveling as both dancing and fencing portray shoveling as fluid and artistic as dancing and as demanding and precise as fencing. Müller describes shoveling as "nichts wärmt den ganzen Körper mehr als das Schaufeln, das am ganzen Körper zehrt" (84). Auberger conveys this dual nature of shoveling. It is both positive in the warmth that shoveling achieves on a cold winter day, and negative in the pain that

repetitive labor causes. This kind of ambivalence, an expression of the very nature of human existence in the camp, is present throughout the novel. The Hunger Angel and the Heart Shovel are described in both positive and negative metaphors, in order to convey their complexity and map new associations to the notions of hunger and labor. Müller takes the norms of labor camps, hunger and manual labor, and ascribes attributes to them that are not the norm.

The Heart Shovel is not the only metaphor of labor in *Atemschaukel*. Müller fills an entire chapter with descriptions of cement. Cement is something precious that should be spared and should not be wasted. The inmates must not allow the dry cement to blow away or become wet in the rain. The process of building walls in the camp is described as a collection of "Maurer, den Mörtel und die Ziegel auf dem Gerüst, aber man sah nicht, dass die Mauern wuchsen" (38). There is no notable progress, until all of a sudden, the walls are tall and are built (38). Auberg claims that this is some trickery of the cement itself. Here cement is deceptive. Müller continues to build off this deceptive characteristic of cement:

"Höher als jede Wand wächst das Misstrauen. In dieser Baustellenschwermut verdächtigt jeder den anderen, dass er am Zementsack das leichtere Ende zu tragen hat, dass er einen ausnützt und sich schon. Jeder wird vom Geschrei erniedrigt, vom Zement hintergangen, von der Baustelle betrogen. . . . Jeden Abend auf dem Heimweg, in der nötigen Entfernung vom Zement, mit dem Rücken zur Baustelle, habe ich gewusst, dass nicht wir uns gegenseitig betrügen, sondern alle betrogen werden von den Russen und ihrem Zement. Aber am

nächsten Tag kam wieder der Verdacht, gegen mein Wissen und gegen alle. Und das haben alle gespürt. Und alle gegen mich. Und das habe ich gespürt." (Müller 38-39)

The cement has the power to make the inmates mistrust each other and suspect one another of being dishonest. The deceptive nature of the cement is projected onto fellow inmates. The cement, a completely inanimate building material, takes on this form of power over the people who work with it. The inmates "leben so, wie der Zement es will" (39). The cement makes the inmates "gehässig" and it is "ein Intrigant" (39). Müller describes the cement in a similar manner to her descriptions of the Hunger Angel. Both cement and the Hunger Angel have power over the minds of inmates. Müller directly states that the cement and the Hunger Angel "sind Komplizen" (39). First the Hunger Angel "reißt die Poren auf und kriecht hinein" (39). And then the cement "klebt der Zement sie zu" and "man ist zementiert" (39). They work together to occupy the body of the inmate. Müller's figurative language depicts the ability of these two entities to take over a human body. Her synecdoche "die Poren" stands for the whole physical body and the way that both the Hunger Angel and the cement take over even the smallest parts of the body. Her verb, "zementiert," demonstrates the heaviness and permanence of the effect that the Hunger Angel and cement have on the inmate. Being cemented is a metaphor for being taken over, occupied or possessed. The cement is a metaphor for totalitarianism, a common thread in Müller's writings (White 75).

Indeed in many instances in this chapter, Auberg relates the untrustworthiness, deception and seeming malice of the cement. Müller writes, "Überall ist er zu sehen und nirgends zu fassen" (36). The very essence of the cement is contradictory:

Zement reichte nie. Kohle gab es mehr als genug. Auch Schlackoblocksteine, Schotter und Sand gab es genug. Der Zement aber ging immer aus. Er wurde von sich aus weniger. Man musste sich in acht nehmen vor dem Zement, er konnte zum Alptraum werden. Nicht nur von sich aus, sogar in sich selbst konnte Zement verschwinden. Dann war alles voller Zement, und es war kein Zement mehr da. (Müller 36)

Müller uses this symmetry of language to depict the nature of the cement for Auberg. Her language demonstrates the almost taunting and nightmarish nature of working with cement. Its ability to become a nightmare stems from its very nature: "Er schürt den Verdacht, weil er fliegt und schleicht und klebt, weil er hasengrau, samtig und amorph ohne Grund verschwindet" (37). The very fact that the cement has no form, makes it something to be feared. Müller's language personifies cement for Auberg. It is such a terrifying entity, that it takes on characteristics of being alive.

Working with the cement becomes such an all-consuming experience that Auberg "[hat] überall Zement gesehen" and he "wurde zementkrank" (40). When the sky is clear, it is "glattgestrichener Zement" (40). When the sky is cloudy, it is "voller Zementhaufen" (40). The rain "knüpfte vom Himmel auf die Erde seine Schnüre aus Zement" (40). Cement is not only seen in the skies and in the rain, but also in animals. Watchdogs and rats had cement fur, lizards had pants of cement and even birds sang scratchy cement songs (40). The cement is not only part of everything around Auberg, but it is also a metaphor for his life. The essence of the cement is also the essence of Auberg. Every day after the inmates have turned the cement into sections of buildings, "Der Zement wird

immer weniger, er kann von sich aus verschwinden" (41). Auberg thinks that he too is "aus Zement und wurde auch immer weniger" (41).

Something so simple as the act of shoveling takes on rhythm and also shows the importance of his labor to Auberg. The whole imagery of the shovel being shaped like a heart and the rhythm associated with its use also fit the image of the rhythmic pumping of the heart. In the chapter titled "Zement" Müller also describes the commands associated with carrying and working with the cement as part of the inmates' heart beat, "Zement muss man sparen, auf Zement muss man aufpassen, Zement darf nicht nass werden, Zement darf nicht wegfliegen" (39).

In the chapter titled "Schlackoblocksteine" Auberg narrates his experience in laboring with the cinderblocks in the camp. He and the other inmates carried the wet blocks to one of the camp yards where the blocks were set out to dry on the ground. Carrying the blocks "war ein langer Balanzakt" and the blocks "durften nicht merken, dass man sie trägt" (153). The inmates had to balance tongue, shoulders, elbows, hips, stomach and knees. Auberg describes the balancing act and the physical strain in detail. He also claims that carrying the blocks "verspannte sich auch das Gesicht" (154). Again Auberg reiterates this idea of work as being some form of art. By portraying his labor as art, Auberg asserts agency. Language is his only tool against the oppression in the labor camp. Even something as mundane and repetitive as carrying cinder blocks requires balance of all the limbs.

In the chapter titled "Jede Schicht ist ein Kunstwerk" Auberg describes his new work assignment in the slag cellar. He works with Albert Gion, a quick-tempered but melancholic fellow inmate. Their task is to flip carts of slag into a huge pile. Auberg uses

repetition of words to underscore the repetition and rhythm of their actions: "Der Albert Gion sagt: Ich kipp drei Wagen, dann kippst du drei. Ich sage: Dann putze ich den Berg. Er sagt: Ja, danach gehst du stoßen" (168). He repeats this dialogue twice. When asked about his work in the slag cellar, Auberg responds, "jede Schicht ist ein Kunstwerk" (169). He repeats this line several times throughout this chapter, in the chapter describing the Minkowski wire and also throughout the remainder of the book (217). This repetition is characteristic of trauma narratives in that the victim's response "takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event" (Caruth 4).

In the chapter titled "Von den Schlacken" Auberg discusses the different types of slag that he was assigned to work with. This chapter portrays another instance of when Auberg's labor helps him combat the conditions of the camp: "So freilebig war die kalte Schlacke, sie schenkte einem den Selbstbetrug, durch den man sich ins Leben zurückstehlen konnte" (175). As mentioned in his article on the dehumanization of individuals in the camps, Steinecke has also stated that "Kunst zur Gegenkraft wird" (23).

In the chapter titled "Von den chemischen Substanzen" Auberg describes how the chemical substances that seep from the bombed out factory and from the piles of waste in the camp are just like the slag. Auberg needs to find words as an antidote to the poison of the chemical substances, "weil man spürte, dass diese Substanzen ihre Attacken fortsetzen und ihr Komplott auch gegen uns Internierte richten. Und gegen unsere Zwangsarbeit" (183). He further narrates that the Russians have already found a word to describe the Romanian-Germans' forced labor: "WIEDERAUFBAU" (183). This word was already detoxified. Auberg argues with their word choice: "Wenn schon AUFBAU,

dann hätte es ZWANGSAUFBAU heißen müssen" (183). Auberg finds himself at the mercy of the Russians and at the mercy of the chemical substances. But he maintains agency: "Weil ich den chemischen Substanzen nicht ausweichen konnte, . . . habe ich beschlossen, die Gerüche der Fabrik zu meinen Gunsten umzudeuten" (184).

After he returns home and is adjusting to his family and his new brother, certain objects remind him of the camp. "An der Wand war das Ticken meine Atemschaukel, in meiner Brust war es meine Herzschaufel. Sie fehlte mir" (265). He had developed a fondness for the objects and characteristics of his labor, because they helped him fight the Hunger Angel.

Even after he has left the camp, he still labors as though the Hunger Angel is watching him. Auberg works in a crate-building factory. He nails crates together all day long and the foreman tells him he is gifted at it. For Auberg, "Jedes Nägelchen hatte seinen harten Kopf, und bei jedem Nageln war die Aufsicht des Hungerengels dabei" (284). In his life after the five years at the camp, Auberg finds his "Arbeitszwang" to be the most burdensome (295). This compulsion to work is the "Umkehr der Zwangsarbeit" (295). This compulsion to work is a traumatic effect of the extreme manual labor conditions that Auberg experienced. It is a relative to chronic desire. One is the desire or longing for something, and the other is a need to do something, whether one desires it or not.

In the same way that Auberg describes "hunger words" and "eating words," there are also words for escaping (184). Auberg uses language as a means of combatting the chemical substances. Additionally, Auberg frequently states that every shift is a work of art. His need to have some form of art within the camp, or his need to maintain artistry



while in the camp, is important to the novel. His labor, or his art, is his weapon against the chronic hunger. Similarly, Müller's use of poetic language is a means of combatting the trauma of forced labor in the camps.

## CONCLUSION

Müller's different uses and relations of these metaphors of hunger and labor, on a base level, create a new way for the reader to look at forced labor camps. Seeing images of emaciated labor camp victims creates one impression on the viewer, but the thrust behind the language she uses to narrate Auberg's story is more powerful than an actual picture. A picture or photograph frames and captures what the photographer wants a viewer to see. But words have their own meanings and connotations in each person's mind. This is what makes metaphors so appropriate for this narration. Reading a story of the forced labor camp through Auberg's thoughts and metaphorical representations of his experiences brings new insights into labor camp victims experiences and offers an important contribution to trauma and *Lager* discourse in giving the victim a voice and agency.

Müller effectively upsets *Lager* paradigms by turning hunger into an angel, a savior and a metaphor for chronic desire. By mapping positive and artistic attributes onto difficult manual labor, Müller achieves a trauma narrative of labor camps that is more poignant than any photograph could achieve, because she speaks through Auberg's voice and gives the power of language to victims of these camps. An agency that the objects of photographs can't be given.

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