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Glajar, Valentina. *The Secret Police Dossier of Herta Müller: A “File Story” of Cold War Surveillance*

Camden House, 2023. 282 pp. \$125.

Scholars of Herta Müller’s fiction and essays are all too familiar with just how deeply her writing is anchored in the experiences of living and working in Ceaușescu’s communist totalitarian Romania, and how the relentless surveillance and persecution by the Romanian secret police, the Securitate, as a kind of communist panopticon, looms large in her work. Valentina Glajar’s painstakingly detailed and meticulously researched scholarly monograph, a gripping narrative that reads like a Cold War spy novel, examines Müller’s Securitate files which are comprised of 577 folios, code-named CRISTINA, and housed at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS). Glajar closely reads and, like a detective, un-codes the archival documents to tell the “file stories” where the files themselves become stories about Müller’s surveillance.

Glajar defines “file story” as “a form of ‘remedial’ life writing, one that unravels skewed life segments coded and recorded in secret police files and recovers them through a multilayered and polyphonic biographical act” (17). A file story interweaves a multitude of voices: From informers and disciplining officers to families and friends, as well as the surveilled themselves, including even officers’ handwritten comments in the margins. The result is “a capricious collage that represents a compelling life story” (17) and attests to Jill Massimo’s argument that “there is no simple, coherent narrative of life under socialism, but rather multiple and, at times, contradictory ones” (20).

Drawing “on the extant literary and historical scholarship on file writing, most notably the work of Allison Lewis on East German Stasi files and Cristina Vatușescu’s study on Romanian and Soviet files” (16), Glajar’s case study covers an impressive breadth: How the “hostile” and “unrealistic” representation of village life in communist Romania in Müller’s early work drew the attention of the Securitate; a deep analysis of the edits, cuts, and additions in the communist Romanian and West German editions of stories in *Niederungen*; documented meetings between Müller, her then-husband Richard Wagner, and Securitate officer Nicolae Pădurariu; the file stories of the sources who spied on Müller; the use of audio sur-

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veillance technology to bug Müller's and Wagner's apartment and the role of translation and mistranslation in the Securitate transcripts of the recordings; and the continued Securitate surveillance of Müller and Wagner after they emigrated to West Berlin in 1987. The monograph also presents readers with reproduced historical documents, such as pages from the Securitate files complete with handwritten notes in the margins and underlining, and their English transcriptions, as well as a surveillance timeline from 1974 to 1993, when the post-communist Romanian intelligence service (SRI) officially closed and archived CRISTINA.

Anyone interested in an ongoing reevaluation of Herta Müller's early work will be particularly rewarded by Chapter 1, "The Filed Story of *Niederungen*." It reconstructs the process through which the Securitate gained interest in Müller and illustrates how intercepted correspondence (letters, telegrams, written invitations, and reviews) allows today's readers to follow the twists and turns in the journey of the *Niederungen* manuscript from Timișoara, Romania, to West Berlin. It also compares in detail excerpts of the short stories from their publication in the Romanian German-language literary journal *Neue Literatur* (1979–1981) and the Kriterion edition in Bucharest (1982) to the West German Rotbuch edition (1984) and the Hanser edition (2010) with their various edits, cuts, and additions. Glajar brilliantly reevaluates Müller's early work as being much less biographical than previous readers and scholarship have posited, and, importantly, "puts to rest persistent allegations of extensive political censorship" (21). While Glajar does remind us that Müller never claimed to write "historical truth" – "Ich schreibe Literatur, nicht Geschichte" – Glajar's intervention not only encourages us to revisit the question about the relationship between the literary and biographical aspects of Müller's early work, but also asks us to consider this question anew in light of the version of events recounted in her files.

Readers of this engaging, clear, and precise scholarly monograph will be left with several insights that open unique and previously unconsidered perspectives on Müller's work and in the Müller scholarship. First, the book demonstrates "that memory can be fallible and distort the truth about one's own past" (Corina Petrescu at the November 2023 virtual launch of Glajar's book). Second, the case study reveals how surviving "the intrusive culture of surveillance [...] often meant a certain degree of entanglement for targets, informers, and bystanders alike" (242). Third, the book represents a paradigm shift in the scholarship on Herta Müller in that, rather than reading the secret police files as a lens through which to analyze Müller's texts, it reads the surveillance files as "file stories." Scholars of Müller's work, students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and general audiences interested in memory studies, reading and un-coding archived Cold War surveillance files, and Cold War surveillance tactics in the communist Romanian context, will find a treasure trove in this monograph.