

# Traces of the Power of the Proletariat Dictator in *Herta Müller's Herztier*

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## ABSTRACT

The peculiarity of the novel as a work of imaginative narrative prose is its element of continuity. The fictional world reaches the reader because of the narrator's mediation. Therefore, the narrator is the most crucial element for readers to understand the story in the novel. This article examined the traces of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the novel *Herztier* by Herta Müller, which the first-person narrator mediated. By using Stanzel's narrative theory, this study focused on two problems. The first one was the description of the power system of the proletariat dictatorship in *Herztier*. The second one was the description of the characters' suffering caused by the dictatorial power system of the proletariat in *Herztier*. Using the content analysis method of the narrative situation in *Herztier*, an overview of the traces of dictatorial power in Romania was obtained through the narrative of the first-person narrator. The narrative of the first-person narrator in *Herztier* showed that her narrative of the proletarian dictatorship's power system and the suffering of society caused by the practice of the proletarian dictatorship system was obtained from the experience and testimony of the narrator.

**Keywords:** *Traces of the power, Proletariat dictator, Narrator.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The novel is the author's aesthetic expression of reality. This reality is an expression of the author's thoughts and concerns about specific problems in life. Herta Müller's novels describe the problems of life in her home country, Romania [1], [2], [3]. Bizuleanu's research focused on the author's imaginative aspect in transferring spatial ideas [1]. It depicts the communist landscape ferocity, the mental trauma, and physical relocation into literary images created with psycho critical and narratological approaches in Müller's novels entitled *Der Fuchs war Damals Schon der Jaeger* and *Herztier*. Besides, Mitroiu examined the past traumas of the characters in all of Müller's novels [2]. Kurniawati studied the form of Brechtian-style resistance of the protagonists in the novel *Herztier* [3]. These studies of Müller's novels all showed the relationship between literature as an imaginative work and reality, especially the reality of Romania under the regime of the dictator Ceausescu who ruled from 1967 to 1989.

This article is intended to investigate the essential elements that can lead the reader to understand the traces of the proletarian dictatorship in the novel.

Stanzel [4] states that the reality in the novel is not the same as the empirical reality. The reality in the novel may be motivated by the author's experience of life, but that reality is the result of the author's creation. Therefore, understanding the novel must be based on the building elements of the story. The author herself also states that her novels are based on experience, but that experience has been changed so that it can be said that these writings are works of fiction, which he calls auto-fiction [3]. Müller was not only a witness to the suffering of the people due to the cruelty of the ruling regime; she herself suffered very profoundly due to the cruelty of the Romanian regime under the leadership of President Ceausescu. The ruler applied a neo-Stalin leadership style that applied the dictatorial system of the proletariat [5].

Based on Müller's opinion about her novel, and Stanzel's view on understanding the story meaning in the novel, this study investigated the traces of the proletariat dictatorship in *Herztier's* novel. Based on Stanzel's view [4], [6], [7], the character of the novel, as imaginative narrative prose, was its indirectness. The fictional world was presented through mediation mediated by the narrator. The narrator acted as a

mediator between the fictional world and the reader. It formed the fabric of the story structure in the novel, which Stanzel called the storytelling situation, making the story different from other novels, even though they have the same theme.

Through studying the storytelling situation in *Herztier*'s novel, the research was directed at two main problems. The first one was the dictatorial government system in Romania, and the second was the characters' suffering caused by the dictatorial system in *Herztier*'s novel. *Herztier* is Müller's novel created after she was deported to Germany [8]. Published in 1992, this novel immediately received a positive response from readers. Therefore, it immediately went for a second print in the same year. Due to these critical novels, Müller had to face the Romania rulers and was expelled from her beloved homeland in 1987. However, her departure from Romania raised her name to the international level. Nevertheless, life outside Romania did not necessarily erase Müller's concern about the socio-political problems in Romania. The author admitted that she could not erase her trauma and still always expressed traces of the socio-political problems in the era of President Ceausescu in her novels.

### ***1.1. The Concept of the Dictator of the Proletariat***

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a term coined by Lenin in his thoughts on power. In Lenin's theory, the existence of the dictator of the proletariat is not meant to be the ruler forever. At some point, when the proletariat can carry out the struggle, it should no longer be needed. However, instead of being a leader who provides guidance, the proletariat dictatorship theory initiated by Lenin is not following its practice [9]. Through his dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin became a totalitarian ruler and an iron fist. He implemented a totalitarian system of power that is unmatched in human history. After the communist states collapsed in the late 1980s, hundreds of millions of people were reported dead due to that system.

Romania was under the leadership of President Ceausescu, which lasted between 1965 and 1989 [5]. Thus, since then, he had held concurrent positions - as head of state and as party leader. In the first three years of his leadership, people could enjoy freedom. Romania was safe and peaceful. There were no demonstrations or movements against government policies. However, from the second decade to the end of his tenure, Ceausescu adopted a neo-Stalin leadership style - an authoritarian dictator. Romania's domestic policy was under the control of the Communist Party, which practiced the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Corruption, collusion, and nepotism, silencing, and massacres were everyday phenomena.

### ***1.2. Stanzel's Narrative Theory***

The novel is a literary genre that presents the face of a fictional world in the form of a story or narrative [6], [7]. According to Stanzel [7], narrative stories are part of the author's efforts to understand various phenomena in life, which are expressions of what the author thinks, feels, or questions about reality. Stanzel's view is that the primary building block of the novel's narrative world is the storytelling situation. Thus, the storytelling situation is a characteristic of narrative stories as a form of the author's world. This element functions as a means of analysis and can direct the reader to understand the text's meaning.

The characteristics of the novel as a narrative story are the existence of mediation or indirectness. Mediation in the novel has a close relationship with the content of the story. The story content or meaning is not only determined by "*what is told*" (a picture of the fictional world), but also "*how the fictional world is told*" [7]. Mediation is a form or construction that displays the content of the story. Thus, mediation plays an essential role in understanding a narrative story. Through the narrator's narrative, the reader understands the meaning of the whole story presented in the fictional world, and the social, historical, and political context is reflected.

The narrator mediates mediation in the novel. The reader understands the fictional world in the novel he reads through the intermediary of a narrator, namely the party who tells about the fictional world [6], [8], [7]. Stanzel's view of the narrator's critical role in narrative stories is based on Kant's view of human limitations in understanding the world. Humans cannot understand the world as it is. Human understanding is obtained "*durch das Medium eines betrachtenden Geistes*" (through the mediation of the subject who sees) [7]. Human understanding of the world can occur through intermediaries so that subjects and objects are formed. With his mind, humans can distinguish between subjects (observing) and objects (observed). In a narrative story, the function of the viewer manifests itself in the narrator. The narrator in the novel is the party who judges, sees, and feels the fictional world. Through the narrator's view, assessment, and appreciation of the fictitious world, the reader can understand and appreciate the fictitious world presented in the novel [6].

In a story, there can be all kinds of narrators, but there is one dominant narrator. To understand the existence of a narrator in a narrative story, Stanzel [8] suggests three basic schemes of storytelling, which he calls a storytelling situation, namely (1) first-person storytelling situations, (2) authorial storytelling situations, and (3) personal storytelling situations that form the typology of storytelling which is called the storytelling situation. Each type of storytelling situation

brings its dominant element. The narrator figure, who is also the actor, is the dominant element in the first-person storytelling situation. Second, the outside perspective dominates the authorial storytelling situation. Finally, reflectors dominate personal storytelling situations.

In his description, Stanzel states that the type of storytelling situation in a story is dynamic. The literary works' peculiarities cause this dynamization as creations that originate from the author's imagination. Imagination is individual and subjective. Therefore, the storytelling situation as a form of creation constructed by the author also can deviate from the basic scheme of the general storytelling situation. The deviation – called the dynamics of the storytelling situation – is not seen as a negative factor; on the contrary, it is part of an element that can show literary aesthetics because that is where the originality of the work lies. In the following, the concepts that underlie the storytelling situations in narrative stories are described.

### 1.2.1. Narrator

The discussion about figures focuses on the narrator's existence as a mediator between the fictional world and the reader. The story is a display of reality that the author has selected. Storytelling is an activity characterized by the presence of a narrator. The reader imagines as if the narrator is standing in front of the narrator. The narrator conveys something to the reader in words. The narrator can be in the form of an identifiable figure (having an identity). However, it can also be a figure whose identity is unknown but whose existence can be felt [6].

When telling a story, the narrator may be a first-person narrator or an auctorial narrator. The two narrators appear as storyteller figures, but have differences in terms of space and time or the proximity of their existence to the fictional world and their appearance at the time of storytelling. The first-person narrator stands before the reader as an identified figure, while the auctorial narrator does not appear to be the figure.

### 1.2.2. Storytelling Perspective

In the fictional world, the narrator's existence is also associated with the "point of view" (narrative perspective). Research on the elements of narrative perspective involves two meanings. First, the narrative perspective concerns the narrator's *Standpunkt* (presence or starting point) at storytelling. Second, the narrative perspective concerns *Einstellung/Haltung* (the narrator's view or attitude) towards the fictional world and its characters or events. From the analysis of the narrative perspective, the author can see the morals and ideologies put forward by the author [7]. Therefore, the

discussion about the narrative perspective cannot be separated from the narrator's element because the study comes from the narrator's narrative process.

### 1.2.3. Storytelling Mode

The storytelling mediation process involves the mode or storytelling technique used. In the process of storytelling, it appears that storytelling techniques are placed on building stories to produce a particular picture of the world. There are two storytelling techniques: (1) *erzählen* (telling) or *berichtende Erzählung* (told narrative), and (2) the dramatization technique - *darstellen* (to describe) or *szenische Darstellung* (presentation through dramatization) [4].

Based on Stanzel's narrative theory above, the understanding of the novel as a narrative story is based on the analysis and discussion of discursive data or textual data, which Stanzel calls the storytelling situation. The storytelling situation includes three elements: the narrator, the storytelling perspective, and the storytelling mode.

## 2. METHODS

This study is narrative research because it examines the meaning of the text based on its narrative elements. The research was conducted on written data using the narrative prose genre, namely the *Herztier* novel. The research was emphasized on exploration and acquisition of meaning. Understanding the meaning of the novel is an interpretive activity. In this study, the analysis was carried out by interpreting the storytelling situation in the novel.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Reflection of the Power System of the Proletariat Dictatorship in *Herztier* by First-person Narrator

The power system of the dictatorship of the proletariat in *Herztier* was realized through the narration of the first-person narrator "Ich" (I), as shown in the following data: "*Ich übersetzte in der Fabrik Anleitungen und hydraulische Maschinen*" (I translated the manual for the [machine] and the hydraulic machine at the factory) [8]. The data shows that Ich's position as a narrator in the story gave her a role as an intermediary between the fictional world and the reader. She was the one who spoke about herself, who worked as a translator in a hydraulic machine factory after graduating from college. She was in charge of translating the instructions for using hydraulic machines in the factory. The first-person narrator is characterized as the party who told stories about the fictional world and acted as a character in the vortex of events.

*Ich*'s existence as a figure allowed her to be part of the phenomenon of society under the rule of the proletarian dictatorship system. "*Sie spürten vielleicht anders als wir, daß der Diktator ein Fehler ist, sagte Edgar*" (They may have a different awareness than us that dictatorship is a mistake, says Edgar) [8]. The data was a dialogue between the character Edgar and the narrator *Ich*. The dialogue expressed Edgar's thoughts and society's state, which was divided into the dictator class and the proletariat class. Edgar's character quoted by the narrator *Ich* showed the central conflict in HT's story, namely the conflict between classes. The conversation between *Ich* and Edgar was placed at the beginning of the story and showed the consciousness of the characters *wir* (us) instead of the unconsciousness of the characters called *sie* (them). *Wir* (us) referred to the protagonists - Edgar, Georg, Kurt, and *Ich* - who were repressed by *sie* (them), the guardians of the dictatorship because those four were trying to dismantle the social irregularities caused by the dictator's power system.

The narrator's position as a speaker and part of the proletarian class made the narrative closer to herself and her group. As part of the class opposite the ruler, the title the narrator chose for the ruling class and its characters tend to be negative. As Wellek and Warren [10] stated, the title is the simplest way used by the author to give personality and bring the characters in his work to life. The term 'dictator' for the highest leadership in the country described, namely Romania, illustrates how the supreme ruler exercises his power [8].

The narrator was not even able to see the character of the dictator directly. The narrator's existence that overlapped with her position as a figure outside of power caused his narrative about the dictator figure was based only on indirect contact. From the beginning to the end of the story, the dictator was only shown through photos and the texts of her speeches that were published in newspapers once a week and through public gossip "*Dann wechselte sie [Lola] die Zeitungsausschnitte, zerknüllte die vorletzte Rede des Diktators und klebte die letzte hinein [in den Glaskasten]*" (Then Lola changed the newspaper clippings, crumpled up the text of the previous week's speech and put the final speech on the wall magazine box) [8]. The narrator's system of dictatorial power can be shown explicitly by what she experienced with the *sie* (them) or the "*seine Wächter*" (the guards [the Dictator figures]). They were police captain Pjele and his dog, whose job was to interrogate, threaten, and intimidate *Ich* and those deemed disturbing security and order, party officials, university officials, and civil society members who were willing to be recruited as spies and accomplices to the authorities.

However, this kind of narrative creates an illusion for the reader that the authoritarian/tyrannical method

practiced by the guards of the Dictator is a picture of the power system practiced by the dictator figure. To exercise his power, the Dictator was not alone. He was assisted by people who supported him, called the *seine Wächter* (his guards) [8]. The Dictator's guards came from lower-level officials and party officials. The term 'guardians' attached to the Dictator's accomplices immediately brings the reader to the understanding that they are people who work to maintain the continuity of power, not for the benefit of the general public. These rulers act arbitrarily, do not hesitate to oppress the people, and abuse their power. In addition, although it never appears explicitly, the Dictator has unlimited power. In that way, the author shows that the Dictator is a ruler who has extraordinary power. The public does not touch his existence because no one can approach and meet him.

The word dictator combined with the word proletariat for the people he leads can give two meanings. First, in the story, the two terms are not used as a single unit but instead refer to two opposing classes in society, as proposed by Marx. There are two classes in society in the story: the ruling class and the proletariat (the class that is ruled). Second, if the words dictator and proletariat are combined, the reader is reminded of the communist system of power that Lenin once echoed, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat. The use of a first-person narrator in *Herztier*'s story can represent the Romanian proletariat dictatorship's system of power under President Ceausescu's leadership.

### ***3.2. The Suffering of the Characters due to the Power System of the Proletariat Dictatorship in Herztier***

The leadership of the proletariat dictatorship created by Lenin is propagated as a motivator to struggle in fighting for a just life [9]. According to Lenin in [9], the proletariat, the working class, needs to get motivation and guidance from the intellectuals because they are generally people with low education and do not understand politics. In Lenin's theory, the existence of the dictator of the proletariat is not meant to be the ruler forever. At some point, when the proletariat can carry out the struggle, it should no longer be needed. However, instead of being a guiding leader, Lenin's theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat did not match his practice. Through his dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin became a totalitarian ruler and an iron fist. He implemented a totalitarian system of power that is unmatched in human history. After the communist states collapsed in the late 1980s, hundreds of millions of people were reported to have died due to that system.

The abuse of the power of the proletariat dictator is evident in the narrative of the first-person narrator in *Herztier* because she and the proletarian class who opposed the ruler's policies were the ones who suffered

from the leadership system. The narrator's account of the poverty suffered by the lower class throughout the country was obtained from his testimony "*Jede Gegend im Land war arm geblieben, auch in jedem Gesicht*" (Every region in this country remains poor, in every face) [8]. From her testimony, the narrator also told the fate of the farmers in that country. They were poor because the fields were barren, and farmers were forced to leave their farms to move to cities and work in factories to do jobs that did not match their skills: "*Bauern, aus dem Dorf geholt*" (farmers brought in from the countryside) [8]. *Ich* witnessed that farmers living in poverty remained poor even though they turned to work in factories. The narrator *ich* gave his testimony about Romania's social and economic problems in the landscape and its population. The poverty experienced by the people, both in rural and urban areas in Romania. The villages were poor and arid, and the cities were filled with slum-looking factories with poor workers. The whole area in Romania remained poor even though the era had developed into an era of industrialization.

The government under the dictatorial system of the proletariat in *Herztier* resulted in injustice and suffering for society. The rulers practiced the rules and laws as much as possible to benefit themselves, their families, and groups. On the other hand, people did not get freedom and always lived in fear. For example, Lola's character - the narrator's roommate - who hoped to graduate in her fourth year and bring home her ideal husband, was murdered by the man of her dreams, namely a sports lecturer at her university who also held a position in the party.

*Als Lola im vierten Jahr studierte, lagen an einem Nachmittag alle Kleider der Mädchen auf den Betten.*

*Und Lola hing an meinem Gürtel im Schrank.*

When Lola was in her fourth year of college, all the girls' clothes were on the bed one afternoon.

And Lola was hung on my belt in the closet [8].

The narrator, who lived in the same room as Lola, and knew about Lola's daily life, knew that the death was a fabrication. Lola was hung using *Ich*'s belt in the wardrobe in the dorm room as if she had committed suicide. The murder incident shook *Ich*'s conscience, so he joined his friends - Edgar, Kurt, and Georg - to uncover the irregularity.

*Edgar, Kurt und Georg suchten jemanden, der mit Lola im Zimmer war. Und weil ich Lolas Heft nicht allein im Kopf behalten konnte, traf ich sie, seitdem sie mich in der Kantine angesprochen hatten, jeden Tag. Sie bezweifelten, daß Lolas Tod ein Selbstmord war.*

Edgar, Kurt, and Georg were looking for someone who lived in the same room as Lola.

And since I couldn't keep Lola's notes alone in my head, I had seen them every day since they talked to me in the cafeteria. They did not believe that Lola's death was a suicide [8].

This attempt led to threats and intimidation towards *Ich* and his friends, which police captain Pjele with his dog carried out. The pursuit of the ruler even resulted in the death of Kurt and Georg and the expulsion of *Ich* and Edgar. Murder was carried out by ordering parties that were not explicitly stated. The killings were carried out against people who were considered to be against and obstructing the Dictator's power and his cronies. Based on the narrator's experience and testimony, the first person can show the people's suffering due to the dictatorial system of the proletariat practiced by the authorities against the narrator and those who are considered to hinder the status and position of the ruler.

The existence of rulers along with the government and political systems in a country played an important role in determining the people fate because the government wheels and the people's lives were determined by the policies of their rulers, described otherwise by the first-person narrator in *Herztier*'s story. The power in *Herztier*'s story is in the hands of a few people who made the rules and laws as large as possible for the benefit of themselves, their families, and their groups, showing injustice and domination were clearly illustrated in the story. Rulers had the privilege to do whatever they wanted. On the other hand, society did not get freedom. People were always being watched. Inherent surveillance was enforced everywhere, even in private spaces.

The dictator's guards carried out various violent actions against those who considered hindering their status and position. The forms of violence they carried out were close surveillance, interrogation, threats, intimidation, and even murder. They did not hesitate to get rid of and kill those who hindered their efforts to carry out their political policies and, at the same time, to maintain their power. As a result, people were constantly afraid. On the other hand, the rulers lived in luxury, while the people suffered greatly. Poverty existed in all corners of the country. As a result, people who could not stand their poverty were willing to become accomplices or spies of the authorities; others traded illegally, stole, and sold themselves.

Through the first-person narrator in the novel, the reader can find traces of the practice of the power of the Romanian dictatorial regime led by President Ceausescu and its impact on society. They did not hesitate to get rid of and kill those who hindered their efforts to carry out their political policies and, at the same time, to maintain their power. This sensitivity is reflected in *Herztier* by Herta Müller. Through *Herztier*, she described how the Romanian rulers practiced the dictatorial system and the consequences for their people.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data research, a traced overview of the dictatorial power in Romania is obtained through the narrative of the first-person narrator. The narrative of the first-person narrator in *Herztier* shows that his narrative about the proletarian dictatorship system and the suffering of society caused by the proletarian dictatorship system practice is obtained from the experience and testimony of the narrator.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first and second authors contributed to exploring the field of literature, the third and fourth authors helped conduct studies in the field of linguistics.

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