

# The Battle

by  
Heiner Müller

**Schlacht** [ʃlaxt], *f.* (*pl.* —en) battle, engagement, fight;

**Schlacht-en** [ˈʃlaxtən], *v.* I. *a.* slaughter; immolate (*a sacrifice*); slay; butcher. II. *n.* (*aux. h.*) massacre. —*cr, m.* butcher. —*ung, f.* slaughtering.

**Schlächter** [ˈʃlɛçtər], *m.* (—s, *pl.* —) butcher. —*'ci, f.* butcher's trade or shop; butchery.

University of Bristol Department of Drama  
*presents*

**THE BATTLE**

by Heiner Müller

*4th - 7th December 1991*

**Glynn Wickham Studio Theatre**

**THE CAST:** Chris Aird, Clare Bennett, Debbie Corder, Naomi Cortes, Lizzie Cox, Sara Dixon, Charlie Ellerington, Daniel Elloway, Fiona Fay, Séan Gaji, Hayley Gearon, Nick Harris, Sarah Hawkin, Marc Helwig, Giovanna Iozzi, Alex Law, Gareth Machin, Fiona McSweeney, Tim Mitchell, Anna Murphy, Catriona Picton-Phillips, Amanda Raine, Sui Rajakaruna, Paul Ryan, Jenny Sanderson, Matthew Sheehan, Tracey Smith, Tina Stevens, Angela Truby, Helen Walker, Claire White, Karen Witthuhn

<b>Director</b>	Günter Berghaus
<b>Choreographer</b>	Séan Gaji
<b>Set</b>	Jennie Norman, Quentin Nichols, Debbie Corder, Daniel Elloway, Hayley Gearon, Fiona McSweeney, Amanda Raine, Tracey Smith
<b>Costume</b>	Sara Easby, Naomi Cortes, Lizzie Cox, Nick Harris, Sui Rajakaruna, Angela Truby
<b>Sound</b>	Keith Yarwood, Jane Ashmore, Nathalie Ginvert, Anna Murphy, Tristan Quinn, Matthew Sheehan, Claire White,
<b>Lighting</b>	Eddie Gowen, Chris Aird, Colette Conroy Marc Helwig, Tim Mitchell, Karen Witthuhn
<b>Stage Management</b>	Richard Arnell, Meleri Evans, Fiona Fay, Nick Posford
<b>Puppet Consultant</b>	Rod Burnett
<b>Puppeteers</b>	Hayley Gearon, Amanda Raine

*For the Department of Drama*

**Production Co-ordinator and**

**Technical Stage Manager**

**Lighting/Sound**

Eddie Gowen

**Construction and**

**Constructional Design**

Quentin Nichols

**Design/Props/Painting**

Jennie Norman

**Costume**

Sara Easby

**Technical Stage Manager**

**Sound/Lighting**

Keith Yarwood

**Theatre Manager**

John Adler

*Wardrobe Care by Persil*

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*'The Battle' is presented as part of the First Year Course in Performance Studies.*

## Heiner Müller: Thoughts on "The Battle"

*The Battle* is not a play, but a loose montage or collage of scenes. Most of them were written almost immediately after the war. At the time it was just an attempt for me to work out this fascist trauma. Then, in 1974 or 1975, I dug this stuff up again and made a collage with it. Only a few of the texts have been rewritten. It might be important to mention that when I originally wrote most of these texts, the situation and my motivation was different than in 1974. At the time people believed that fascism was a purely political-economic question. In the meantime, word has of course gone round that one cannot abolish fascist attitudes and psychology by simply expropriating the key industries. There was a time when I was interested in moral anti-fascism. But of course this leads to nowhere, because innocence happened to be a matter of luck. Once, after a performance in Geneva, a discussion took place, and one man said: "I'm a Jew, I was in a concentration camp. Your play deeply disturbed me because it revived all the old memories. But it made me realize for the first time that I stood on the other side by pure chance. It was not my due to be a Jew, to be a prisoner. I might as well have been on the other side."

Brecht's primary concern in the theatre was enlightenment. I believe the time for this is past because today other media have taken over this function. Theatre today should, as I see it, involve people in processes, which call for their participation, exactly in the way I described it for *The Battle*. People should ask themselves: How would I have acted then? And they should realize that in this type of situation, they are also potential fascists.

The text deals with situations where the human being, burst asunder by a crisis, can only partially bring to realization its characteristics as an individual.

"What is this thing in us that fornicates, lies and murders?" It is the task of art and literature to find out how mankind is fashioned, what drives the animal in us to commit what we call history.

Only the increasing pressure of authentic experience develops the capacity to look history in the eye, which can be the end of politics and the beginning of the history of mankind.

The best way to kill a nation is to extinguish its memory and its history. In order to get rid of the nightmare of history, you first have to acknowledge its existence. You have to know about history, otherwise it would come back as a nightmare in the old-fashioned way, like Hamlet's ghost.

The trouble with history is that it is covered with flesh and skin, surface. The main impulse is to get through the surface in order to see the structure. Our historical consciousness has been undermined by a superficial notion of topicality. The theme of fascism is and will remain topical, I'm afraid, during our lifetime.

I believe that the function of literature at this point is something like the liberation of the dead. Digging them up and showing them in the open. Maybe their flesh is rotten, but they had dreams, problems, ideas that have not decomposed in the same way. To know the dead you have to eat them. And then you spit out the living particles.

Tragic conflicts cannot be invented. They can only be adapted and varied, as the Greeks did, or Shakespeare. I'm fascinated by the ancient myths, because they are formulations of early collective experiences. Unfortunately, they still contain common truths. Seen from an anthropological viewpoint, the human condition has changed very little over the last centuries. Only minimal human development has taken place. That is why today the old models still hold true.

*The Battle* is an attempt to construct a fragment synthetically. Fragmenting an event emphasizes its process character; it prevents the production from being obliterated in the product and the process becoming a commodity. Instead of a simulacrum of reality it produces a field of experimentation, where the audience assumes the role of a co-producer. Theatre can only fulfil its true function when it offers people an occasion to re-live their own lives and variations or scenes from it. People have to leave the theatre different from how they entered it. Then, theatre truly has the function of a laboratory.

## Heiner Müller: Reflections on a Post-Brechtian Theatre Aesthetics

For something to come / something else has to go / the first sign of hope is fear / the first sign of the new is horror.

The function of horror is no other than forcing people to perceive, to learn. A large group of people has never learned anything but through horror, or shock. I do not have the widely practised talent to cheer up a jaded audience with harmonies that only exist in the sphere of dreams. I'm neither a dope- nor a hope-dealer.

I believe in conflict. I don't believe in anything else. What I try to do in my writing is to strengthen the sense of conflict, to strengthen confrontations and contradictions. There is no other way. I'm not interested in answers and solutions. I don't have any to offer. I'm interested in problems and conflicts. Impact can only be achieved through rupture.

The function of art is to question reality. I have the rather primitive urge to destroy illusions. When I describe things I produce reality, or I destroy reality, and, maybe, I produce an awareness of things. Describing a process is a political act. To find words for reality already means that one is mastering this reality. The Utopian moment lies in the form, also in the elegance or beauty of the form, not the content. In the form we can see reflected the possibility of mastering reality. This is not to say that form is already the victory, but it indicates the possibility of conquest.

Theatre sticks up to its neck in Naturalism. Naturalism leads to the expurgation of the author from the text, and of the author/director/actor/audience from the theatre. When theatre is produced in a Naturalist fashion, it turns into a mausoleum of literature, and cannot function as a laboratory of social fantasy. It does not serve as an instrument of progress, but rather preserves an already surpassed state of existence.

Today's mass media have the tendency to extinguish the world by representing it. The world - or reality, if such a thing exists - is slowly being replaced by its simulacrum. A key function of today's art must be to counteract this flood of images by jamming people's viewing habits. A cleaned up, smoothly running world is, after all, a non-human world. For art to be human, it has to be messy. Humans are more untidy than computers.

Nothing is more fragmentary than a perfect play. A dramatic text has to be an island of disorder on which the audience can settle. There is no law, no structural necessity for a performance to have a beginning and an end. The pores between the part and the whole ought not to be closed. By giving a play a fragmentary structure one can guarantee that these pores remain open. In one instant whole epochs can be opened up.

I think theatre only comes to life when one element questions another. Movement questions stasis and stasis questions movement. The text questions silence and silence questions the text, and so on. The result is a new reality which theatre needs to assert against the coercion, or the demand, of copying or simply reproducing reality. This is probably the most important political function of theatre.

The role of the author is to draw the audience into a necessary argument and to provide them with the appropriate instruments for this argument.

When I read a text, a poetic text, in the initial stage I don't want to understand it. I want to take it in, but like a sensual experience rather than a mental act. The rationalist tradition prevents the sensual appreciation of a text. Only when one experiences a text sensually, can one arrive, at a later stage, at an understanding of it. It is a totally wrong attitude trying to make it easy for an audience to understand a play. One has to distance them from the text and make it difficult for them. This is basically what Brecht always emphasized in his theories: to give the spectators a chance to distance themselves from the story so that they can get an overview, so that they can see the structure and are prevented from succumbing to their emotions.

I don't believe that art and politics can simply be aligned on parallel tracks. When you translate an idea into an image, either the image will become askew, or the idea explodes. I'm all in favour of the explosion. Genet expressed this very concisely: the only thing a work of art can achieve is to awaken a longing for another state of the world. This longing is revolutionary.