

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

**Culture and Power in German-Speaking Europe, 1918–1989, vol. 2. Rochester: Camden House, 2023. xi, 282 pp. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Map. \$125.00, hard bound; \$29.95, eBook.**

Katherine Verdery

The Graduate Center, CUNY  
Email: [kverdery@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:kverdery@gc.cuny.edu)

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.468

This fascinating book is an excellent example of what its author calls a “file story,” which she defines 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 biographical act” (17). To write such a story is not unlike the work of a detective. The sleuth needs to follow the “loquacious narrative” of the Securitate [communist Romanian secret police], “the officers’ surgical scrutiny in creating their hostile targets, the brushes they used to paint the target’s portrait, all the while attempting to un-code what has been coded” (17). Glajar’s book does just that.

In the case at hand, Romania’s Securitate brought under surveillance the German-language writer Herta Müller and her husband, Richard Wagner, both from an area of German minority settlement in western Romania. The book follows their relationship with the Securitate from her first encounters with it in 1983 to their departure for Germany in 1985. The file shows four stages of Müller’s surveillance. 1) Officers create her as “Cristina” (their name for her), who manifests a hostile image of life in Romanian villages that justifies their surveillance of her. 2) They woo her and maintain regular contact, seeking to make her more malleable. 3) They monitor her increasing reputation, modifying her surveillance as a result, and finally 4) they arrange for the couple’s emigration, showing that the balance of power has shifted decisively in Müller’s favor. Once she is gone, they denigrate her, seeking to isolate her from her old friends and spreading rumors that she was herself a collaborator, so as to minimize her further influence in Romania.

The narrative provides a fascinating picture of the situation of minority writers in Romania during the 1970s and 80s. For example, Glajar notes that writers often used metaphorical language so as to bypass censorship and that censorship for minority writers like Müller tended to be lighter than for Romanians. In particular, the censorship apparatus allowed more daring books in German, in hopes of convincing West Germany of the relative freedom of Romania’s German writers (51).

The book is particularly valuable for its treatment of the relations between Müller and her Securitate officer, Nicolae Padurariu. Over time, their rapport grew. Padurariu presented himself as humane, friendly, and sympathetic to the difficult situation of a minority writer, whom he encouraged. Müller appeared obedient and did not create embarrassment for the regime when she traveled to Germany. But as she and her husband pestered him so as to be allowed to travel *together* (enabling them to leave Romania at the same time), they were unaware that listening devices in their apartment had already informed the officer of their plans. Padurariu, for his part, is walking a tightrope: building trust but knowing they will leave, which he will have to mediate with his organization. Meanwhile, he plies his trade: recruiting their friends as informers, trying to break apart their circle by playing people off against each other, continuing to woo her and render her more malleable if he can, and eventually enabling their departure for Germany while trying to recruit them to inform

about people there. When the Securitate finally agreed to the couple's emigration, they had no reason to imagine that in 2009, Müller would be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Also illuminating is material about some of the couple's informers, as well as indications that the Securitate was good at finding people to inform and training them well. Not only that: officers might create such a strong relation with some informers that those who later emigrated to Germany themselves would visit the officers on return visits, sometimes bringing them gifts! One can only wonder at the psychology of such relationships.

The material in a Securitate file, sensitively interpreted as it is here, thus gives us a unique understanding of surveillance, that basic instrument of oppression in communist societies.

## **Ed. Ewa Geller, Michał Gajek, and Agatha Reibach. *Yiddish as a Mixed Language: Yiddish-Slavic Language Contact and Its Linguistic Outcome.***

**Brill Studies in Language Contact and the Dynamics of Language, vol. 3. Leiden: Brill, 2023. xviii, 286. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Tables. \$144.00, hard bound.**

Cyril Aslanov

Aix-Marseille Université  
Email: [msaslan@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:msaslan@mail.huji.ac.il)

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.469

This collective monograph by four Polish Yiddishists proposes a balanced position between two extreme stands regarding the nature of the contact between Eastern Yiddish and some Slavic languages: Max Weinreich's assumption as to the Slavic adstratic influence on a language that was allegedly already constituted when Ashkenazi Jews resettled in central and eastern Europe on the one hand, and Paul Wexler's thesis that considers Yiddish the outcome of a relexification of Judeo-Sorbian and Kyiv-Polissian on the other hand.

In Ch. 1, Michał Gajek reconsiders the section in the *History of the Yiddish Language* where Weinreich deals with the lexical impact of Slavic languages on Eastern Yiddish and confronts the insights of the founder of Yiddish linguistics with more recent developments in that discipline (Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, 2008, 525–619). Gajek remarks that Weinreich's description of Slavic influences on Eastern Yiddish also entails a morphological dimension, especially as far as the Tense-Aspect-Mode-system is concerned. However, according to Gajek, Weinreich "analyzed them in isolation" (13). He reminds us that more recent research, like Ewa Geller's, one of this book's contributors, have given a far more substantial picture of the Slavicization of Yiddish grammatical structures. Lastly, Gajek analyzes Weinreich's description of the Slavic syntactical and phonological influences on Yiddish. His conclusion on Weinreich's legacy in the appraisal of the Slavicization of Yiddish is that this linguist perceived the many Slavisms in Yiddish in an atomistic way instead of viewing them as the manifestation of a typological shift.

Ch. 2, by Ewa Geller and Michał Gajek, puts in perspective the scholarly controversies on the emergence of Yiddish as a mixed language. It describes the hesitation between a Schuchard-inspired approach based on the principle of convergence between languages in contact and a genealogical model whereby Yiddish appears as a divergent derivate of German. Taking distance from Wexler's theories about the language shift through massive