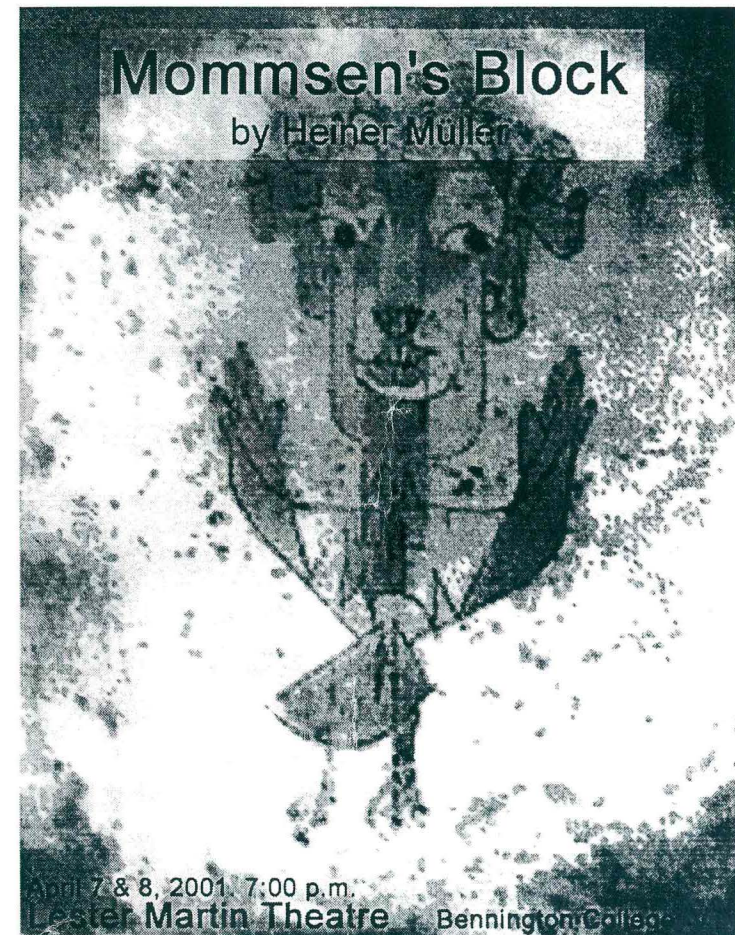


"There is a painting by Klee called 'Angelus Novus'. An angel seems caught moving away from something he is staring at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are outspread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see a chain of events, he perceives a single catastrophe which constantly heaps ruin upon ruin and slings them at his feet. The angel would like to linger, to awaken the dead, and mend what is broken. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has caught in his wings and is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him unchecked into the future to which his back is turned, while the ruins before him heap up toward heaven. This storm is what we call progress."

Special Thanks to:

Sarah McNair of Alan Brodie Representation
Helen Chadwick
Jane Heather
Sue Jones
Kryssy Wright
Liz Pellerin
Scene Shop Crew



Mommsen's Block

Written by Heiner Müller

Cast---

Estee Clauss
Meredith Honig
Elizabeth Kessler
James Nyman
Amber Schermann
KJ Swanson
Laura Wallace
Dan Warren

Colleen Doherty
Anna Johnson
Michael Metivier
Pélé Alethea
Garth Silberstein
Stephanie Vella
Maria Wark
Laura Wilson

Director by---

Set Design---

Costume Design---

Sound Design---

Lighting Design---

Video---

Technical Director---

Stage Manager---

Runcrew---

Light Board Operator---

Sound Board Operator---

Wardrobe---

Light Hang Crew---

Program---

Edward Kemp
Sue Rees
Sue Rees
Nate Aldrich
Monica Hubbard
Sue Rees and
Gokcen Ergene
Andrew Cancellieri
Will Heyser

Colleen Leonardi
Aadya Bedi
Kamal Shaikh
Krissy Smith
Kara Bassman
Alethea Root
Samuel Haase
Jess Purvis
Carishma Mehta
Dannike Walker
James Zapokin
John Boyd
Seher Aziz

What authorities are there beyond Court tittle-tattle?

--- Mommsen to James Bryce, 1898

Christian Matthias Theodor Mommsen was one of the most influential German historians of the 19th century. Born in 1817 he was the son of a pastor, and although his political radicalism later led to his abandoning his family's Lutheran Christianity he inherited his father's deep suspicion of Catholicism. He was educated at home with his two brothers and learnt Latin from an early age. Soon after graduating from Kiel University he won a scholarship to study the antiquities in Italy, a journey which began his life's work of cataloguing and editing all the extant Latin inscriptions throughout Europe. In 1848 he was appointed to a chair of jurisprudence at the University of Leipzig, but lost his position two years later as a result of his political activities: at first a supporter of the monarchy against the republicans, he alienated the successful reactionaries by protesting against their violent retaliations.

In 'exile' he was appointed to the chair of Roman law at the University of Zurich, and later to the same chair at the University of Breslau. It was at this time that he wrote the first three volumes of his projected five-volume Roman History, the third volume concluding with Julius Caesar's accession. Considered one of the most masterly histories ever written, the three-volume Roman History is an unmatched re-creation of Roman society and culture based largely on his study of ancient coins, inscriptions, and literature. Some have detected Mommsen's own liberal politics within his view of ancient history and have identified his German contemporaries within his Roman scene, in particular the malignant effect of the 'squirearchy' and the clergy upon the Roman republic. Although a great admirer of Caesar as the saviour of a dying state, Mommsen vigorously denounced Caesarism. His determination to bring the ancients down to earth from the Olympian heights upon which they appeared to the general public, produced a modern style which was not to the taste of all.

In 1854 he returned to Berlin and succeeded taking charge of editing all known Latin inscriptions by the Berlin Academy of Sciences. In 1873 he was elected perpetual secretary of the Academy, a post he maintained with an autocracy which belied his liberal politics: Roman historians who disagreed with Mommsen were left with no option but to emigrate. The unification of Germany in 1870 led Mommsen further into politics, publicly opposing the policies of Bismarck; his Roman Constitution of 1871-88 can be seen as a critique of the constitution of the new federal Germany.

From 1881 to 1884 he was a member of the German parliament. In 1885 he published the fifth volume of the Roman History, covering the Roman Provinces, which many critics considered inferior to the magisterial early work.

In 1902, by which time he had become a near mythical figure for his contemporaries, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first German and to date the only historian to receive this honour. The Swedish Academy said of the Roman History "it is a monument which, though it may not possess the soft beauty of marble, is as perennial as bronze. The scholar's hand is visible everywhere, but so is the poet's", and praised his ability "to turn carefully investigated facts into a living picture".

Mommsen died on November 1 1903 in Charlottenberg, Berlin, four weeks short of his 86th birthday. He was married to Marie Reimer, the daughter of his publisher, who bore him 16 children, 4 of whom died at birth.

Heiner Müller was born in 1929 in Saxony, the son of an official in the German Social Democratic Party. One of his earliest and formative memories was aged 4 seeing his father arrested by Gestapo officers. In 1945 Müller himself was drafted into the German Army, witnessing the final convulsions of World War II and spending the last months in an American POW camp. With the partition of Germany into East and West he chose not to follow his parents westward, but to remain in the Communist sector, working briefly as a librarian, and journalist and finally as a playwright and director.

In the 1950s he began to emerge as one of the most remarkable of the disciples of Bertolt Brecht, completing his artistic apprenticeship at Brecht's Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin. Many of his early plays are responses either in form or content to Brecht's work, others are adaptations of material from the classics or Shakespeare. His work, which confronted the contradictions in trying to build socialism in East Germany brought him into increasing conflict with the authorities, and many of his works were banned in the East. However he was sufficiently prized as a cultural figure to be allowed to travel abroad, and visits to the University of Texas in Austin in the 1970s accelerated a departure from the Brechtian model to more fragmentary and imagistic forms, a move which found him described by some German critics as the 'anti-Brecht'.

In the 1980s he began to work with Western artists such as Robert Wilson, who has staged productions of several Müller texts, most notably Hamletmachine. Of this play Müller wrote "My main interest when I write plays is to destroy things. For thirty years Hamlet was for me an obsession, so I wrote a short text with which I tried to destroy Hamlet. Germany history was another obsession, and I tried to destroy this obsession too, that whole complex". With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent re-unification of Germany Müller's situation changed again, for he had outlived his old enemies in the former East German regime. However, he remained a dangerous and unpredictable force, still at loggerheads with the authorities; many of his unpopular predictions of exploitation and mass unemployment have come true. He was appointed Artistic Director of the Berliner Ensemble, a post he held until his death from cancer in 1995. His death provoked public displays of grief and homage throughout Berlin, and a mass rally was held on his birthday the following year.

Mommsen's Block

The impetus for the play seems to have been the appearance in 1992 of notes taken during Mommsen's lectures on the Roman Emperors. Despite Mommsen's stipulation in his will forbidding publication of his lectures, these notes taken by a student were published alongside a fragment of material ('the Academy fragment') rescued from the fire in Mommsen's house in 1880 as representing the material that might have composed the missing fourth volume. Müller at the time was facing a writer's block of his own, how and what to write in the newly reunified Germany. The Wall, which Müller had always cited as the most concrete manifestation of our age, had gone, and with it a paradigm which had informed much of Müller's work. The reunification of Germany changed Mommsen's situation as well: his statue, which had been replaced by one of Marx, was returned to its pedestal outside Berlin's Humboldt University.

The play was first staged at the Nitory Theatre of Stanford University in 1994. Before his death Müller himself recorded it for German radio, in a broadcast to which he added the text of Walter Benjamin's 9th treatise on the Philosophy of History, in which Benjamin describes Paul Klee's painting 'Angelus Novus'. We have followed Müller in including this text and image, which has become a trope for the position of the liberal artist caught in the storm of history.