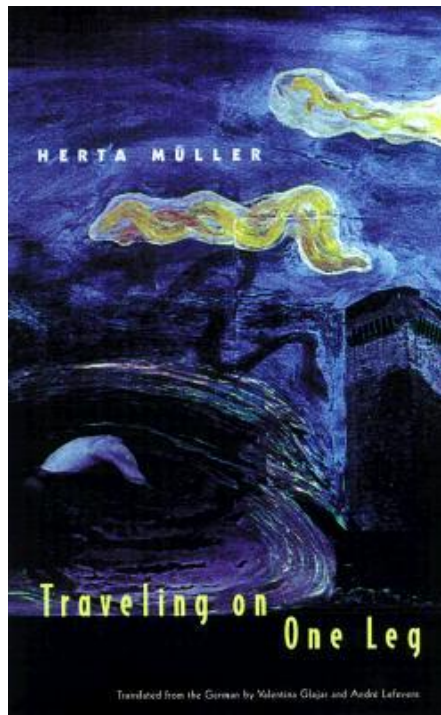




Traveling on One Leg

Herta Müller , Valentina Glajar (Translation) , André Lefevere (Translation)

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The protagonist of Herta Muller's Traveling on One Leg is Irene, a fragile woman born to a German family in Romania, who has recently emigrated from Romania to Germany. The novel focuses on Irene's relationship with three men: Franz, whom she met in Romania and who was unwilling to respond to her love for him; Stefan, a friend of Franz's; and Thomas, a bisexual bookseller in perpetual crisis. Despite being born to a German family, Irene's place in Germany is as a recent emigre and an unassimilated Romanian German. She feels neither longing for Romania nor any comfort in her newly adopted Germany. Politically and socially isolated, Irene moves within the emotional orbit of these three men, while at the same time moving between West Berlin, Marburg, and Frankfurt, taking a dissonant journey within strange yet familiar territory. Characterized by the same sense of profound isolation found in Muller's The Land of Green Plums (see page 20), Traveling on One Leg is a poignant exploration of exile, homeland, and identity.

Traveling on One Leg Details

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From Reader Review *Traveling on One Leg* for online ebook

Patryx says

Nel 2009 riceve il Premio Nobel per la Letteratura, con la seguente motivazione: «Con la concentrazione della poesia e la franchezza della prosa ha rappresentato il mondo dei diseredati»

Non c'è un modo gentile per dirlo: questo libro non mi è piaciuto, anzi direi che è stato uno dei libri più noiosi che abbia mai letto. L'ho finito perché non mi piace abbandonare i libri e l'ho letto più per rispetto a questo principio che per interesse.

Per prima cosa, un'importante istruzione per l'uso: per poter cogliere il filo conduttore ed entrare nel mondo di Irene (la protagonista) è importante leggere questo libro (breve, per fortuna!) con continuità, invece io l'ho letto in modo frammentario. Di conseguenza ogni volta riprendere il filo, spezzato, dei pensieri di Irene mi costava grande fatica (e non appena avevo intuito qualcosa, dovevo subito interrompere.)

Forse più che un romanzo è una raccolta di poesie che si succedono senza soluzione di continuità e a me le poesie piacciono a piccolissime dosi: una ogni tanto e non troppe tutte insieme.

Il libro ci immerge nel mondo interiore di Irene, una donna rumena che ha lasciato la Romania di Ceaușescu e ha chiesto asilo politico nella Germania Federale. I pensieri di Irene ci comunicano la solitudine di chi ha lasciato il suo mondo per ritrovarsi straniera (anche se cittadina tedesca) in mezzo ad altre persone che, invece, sembrano avere chiaro qual è il loro posto nel mondo. La condizione degli esuli è quelle di

Viaggiatori - pensò Irene – viaggiatori con lo sguardo eccitato sulle città addormentate. Su desideri ormai scaduti. Dietro agli abitanti della città.

Viaggiatori su una gamba sola e sull'altra perduti. Viaggiatori che arrivano troppo tardi

Lo stato d'animo (disorientamento, ambivalenza nei confronti del paese abbandonato, tristezza) della protagonista più che dalle parole, secondo me, viene mediato dallo stile del romanzo: le frasi brevi, i periodi spezzati, il continuo ripetere il nome della protagonista. Però a livello emotivo non ho sentito nulla di tutto ciò, solo una forte senso di noia e, in alcuni casi, di aggressività verso l'atteggiamento passivo della protagonista:

In momenti del genere Irene capiva che la sua vita si era rappsa in un fascio di osservazioni.

Le osservazioni la rendevano incapace di agire.

Quando Irene si imponeva di agire, non erano vere azioni. Rimanevano bloccate negli inizi.

Erano inizia destinati a fallire. Nemmeno i singoli gesti restavano integri.

Così Irene non viveva nelle cose, ma nelle loro conseguenze. (pag. 142)

La parte che mi è piaciuta di più (forse perché è quella che ho capito) è quella in cui Irene racconta del difficile rapporto con il suo paese: a poco a poco si rende conto che prova, ma questo sentimento arriva alla sua consapevolezza gradatamente, facendosi strada tra le altre emozioni che scandiscono la sua quotidianità:

Irene ebbe anche un altro sospetto. Quello di mantenere in testa una nostalgia piccola e dispersa, per non doverla ammettere. Di tradire la nostalgia nel momento in cui saliva. E per soffocarla di costruire edifici di pensieri sopra i sentimenti. (pag. 66)

Branden says

when there is an author i'm interested in, i frequently FREQUENTLY make the mistake of ignoring the books that friends and the rest of the world recommend to me as his/her "best work" and feel some godawful obligation to go into his/her back catalogue and starting reading them from the earliest work onward - or, in this case, the earliest novel available in translation. what a disaster. this book took me much longer to force myself through than anything in recent memory. above all, i blame the translation. i think i would have had better luck putting the original text through google translate. from what i understand, Mueller writes in a clipped, lyrical, impressionistic/imagistic style that borders on prose poem, but this just felt like a boring nightmare. i'm pretty sure any nuances or double-resonances woven into the original German were completely abandoned here. the result is a clunky, hideous, needlessly obtuse read. to be honest, i'm quite saddened, because i was really hoping to love the author. though i suppose there's still hope. at some point i'll get to *The Land of Green Plums* and *The Hunger Angel*, but i think i need a bit of distance from this slow trauma. note to self: just read the book that the rest of the world tells you to read first.

Do?an says

?rene isimli bir m?ltecinin Almanya'ya gidip orada ?ekti?i yabanc?la?may? anlat?yor. Ama bask?dan m? çeviriden mi anlamad?m kitapta birden ba?ka konuya atlama, anlams?z cümleler vard? ve konu?ma çizgileri yoktu. Nadine Gordimer'den sonra Herta Müller'de bitmi?tir benim için.

Nithesh says

This book astonishes me for the way in which it is written. Without quotation marks, the words said by the characters of the story seem to merge seamlessly into the narrators voice. I wonder if that is grammatically right or it happens to be just another aesthetic aspect of the book. The plot is hazy, the characters lack any goal or agenda. They just exist among other things. The entire book is about one image : that of isolation. A profound isolation brings along with it a profound chaos. One that can't be tolerated or brought back to equilibrium. Hence, the book aptly starts and ends in chaos.

The characters in this story are distracted by their surroundings. They flit between reality and their imagined words. The story stands out in my memory for its incoherence. There is no plan for the protagonist in this story Irene. Her complex love and self conversations amaze me. The images and comparisons of objects that Muller paints vis-a- vis Irene's moods/ emotions is are brilliant.

"Irene pushed up her sleeve. She looked at her watch. Instead of dials , Irene saw an endless connection on the dial. A jerky movement that distributing itself equally over things that were present and people who were absent."

She is in conflict with her old self and present. Her love for a younger Franz and bisexual Thomas entangle her in a conundrum. The image that Muller creates in the end where Irene is unable to distinguish the two

faces and the words spoken created a vivid image inside my head.

I also love the strangers in the background that Muller describes in a quirky way. Strangers are a compass for Irene in the story. At some point she says : "Irene knew that a time would come when the dead and the living would be equally divided." She views herself as a flawed being who is unable to come to terms with the changing world around her.

I would read this book again for its images and chaos. A beautiful chaos with a dark shade of sorrow painted all over it.

Ana-Maria says

The writing is poetic, like all HM writings and this is what attracts me to her books. The female character is really someone with no history, we are just immersed into her emotions, thoughts and sensations. It is as if we are transferred behind her eyes and we start seeing the world as Irene. Just as abruptly we leave her, when the book ends. What do we discover? That someone in transition, who just left a communist country for West Berlin, is really suspended between worlds. There is no euphoria of finding freedom or abundance, as we would imagine. Rather she is a hyper - perceiving person, alone, trying to connect with a man or another that she meets by chance, who lives in a dream like state, observing things around her that remain invisible for regular people. You feel like she went through something that really traumatized her, but we are never sure if that really happened or is just her hyper emotional tendencies at play. She is also very non selective in respect to people around her. It looks like she has no family or friends and she can accept whoever comes. But her acceptance is partial: it is like her instincts ask her to connect, but her skills prevent her to. I was never sure, while reading this book, if this was a story about emigration, as it was presented, or actually about mental illness and emotional suffering. Or maybe both.

Zamartina says

These two poor stars do not probably reflect the literary quality of the book, but rather my own reaction to it, which was almost nonexistent. Now, to mark so low a Nobel prize winner makes you always feel "somehow" ignorant. I probably did not understand it and most certainly it required a second level in-depth reading I did not give. Perhaps I should even read it again, it is short after all. But I like books where all this is not necessary, where feelings, emotions, resemblances and reflections of our experiences are immediate and not hidden behind beautiful words (because I have to admit some sentences were real poetry). I do myself live abroad, I do myself miss my country, for personal reasons and not because I was forced to, yet I could not share Irene's nostalgia, alienation, apathy feelings. I must be a more positive person, or better said, I guess life let me be positive so far. Two Herta Muller's books after, it seems that I still have an internal debate about this writer, on whether I don't understand it as I should, or I do understand everything there is to understand, but I simply do not like her.

(This is my first review in English - please forgive my mistakes if any)

James F says

This is the third book I've read by Müller in the last week. This one is about a woman in early middle age who has emigrated to West Germany from "the other country" -- presumably Romania, though it is never specified. She lives alone and in isolation. The book, like the previous two, is written in a surreal style with reality and dreams blended so that one is never sure what is actually happening.

Now that I am somewhat accustomed to her style, I can't help comparing it to last year's Nobel prize winner, Le Clezio; there are definite similarities in their writing. Both write in an experimental, surreal style, with disjointed description rather than plot or movement; both can be (are are) described as "bleak", with characters who never form real relationships and whose lives are largely pointless; both are decidedly anti-urban, with images of walking around streets, going into stores without buying anything, etc; and both give the curious impression of being both intensely political and deliberately apolitical at the same time. Of the two, I think I somewhat prefer Müller -- her writing is more concentrated, and never becomes repetitious or boring, as Le Clezio is at times; she also does not have the vague religiousness and nostalgia for the primitive which annoyed me in Le Clezio. I can't help wondering whether this represents a common European style or if the Nobel prize committee is simply attracted to a particular kind of writing; I haven't read enough serious contemporary European fiction to judge.

Christian Engler says

To say that *Traveling on One Leg* was a gloomy novel would definitely not be off the mark. But it is heavy in a good and honest way. It is rooted in the author's own life experiences and those of the Romanian citizens whom she depicts as also having transplanted themselves to other countries. Because truth is the foundation of this novel, it gives this work a heavy-hearted edge, that as a reader, is not all too easy to digest. The other Amazon reviewers, I agree, hit the mark with their assessments of this excellent novel, in essence, that it is extremely personal and that the evocative nature of loneliness and disjointedness is thoroughly yet tangibly conveyed. More than a novel, the reader is almost transported into a nightmarish dream sequence, where life and living is the nightmare. It is a novel that is poetically written in a hardened verse format. The language of poetry is short, trenchant, having to pack a wallop with the fewest words available to the author; the writer has to be extremely selective in her word choice, and Herta Muller is selective, evinced by this novel that does thrust a forceful literary punch.

The story revolves around the female protagonist Irene, a transplant from the repressive country of Romania whose presidential figurehead is a ruthless, paranoid and self-absorbed dictator (Ceausescu) who espouses backward, socialist ideologies. Anyone who lives under the unfortunate umbrella of his leadership don't have much hope of living a life of freedom, individuality, prosperity and a go-at-it-alone work ethic. Hence, people try to defect, and Irene is one of those who does. Yet, her homeland is not the enemy; it is the victim. Irene is just an offshoot of the country, a tree branch connected to the trunk (the country). The disease is communism, and it is affecting every fiber of society. But when she emigrates to Germany (as Muller herself did in 1987), she is not greeted into a land of golden opportunity. She is a legalized émigré who has been uprooted from all that is familiar to her. And although she is free from the harm that communism carries, she can not relate to her new homeland, for there is no pride, no connection, nothing. She has her baggage-mentally and physically speaking-and her memories. And nothing else. She is like a newborn babe who has to start anew. However, the contaminated mother's milk of her homeland has infected her development in more ways than one. Being an isolated loner is just a tip of the iceberg.

While in Germany, she befriends three men Franz, Stefan and Thomas, all of whom seem mentally crippled in their own right. And as misery loves company, she is drawn to them for the individuality. And though their individuality is not one of an uplifting nature (individuality Irene never encountered in Romania), she is attracted to that characteristic in them regardless. As people are not automatons, for they are flesh and blood and capable of joys, sorrows and growth, she sticks with them and by them. But it is really pointless. She is like a ping pong ball going back and forth trying to find some measure of concreteness to firmly clasp onto. In a nutshell, it's hopeless with these three guys. She is in a void, a kind of limbo where all she can really do is reflect, remember and analyze: "If you would see the city from the inside, it would be different. Irene is a name of a faraway city, if you get close to it it becomes different. It's one city if you go by and don't enter it, and another if you get moved by it and don't leave it. It's one city if you come to it for the first time and another if you leave it, never to return. A different name for each." Pages 81-82. Irene escapes the daily nightmare of faux cultural, social and political assimilation when on page 144 she states: "Neither dead nor alive...It was almost joy." She literally has to be an empty vessel and not be beholden to anybody or anything in order to feel truly free. But that is next to impossible and only fleeting at best.

Traveling on One leg was a fascinating read whereby no core action (marriage, careerism, childbirth), as taken by Irene, could be specifically defined. The whole work, for me, seemed so dream-oriented. It was like a person was trying to keep the insanity that no one else (except Irene) could see or feel, at arm's length. I could almost visualize Irene waking up from a nightmare while living in Romania about what life in Germany could be like. Overall, the book was very powerful, maybe even more so than The Appointment and The Land of Green Plums. In any event, it is a hard book that one will not easily forget. It is dreary, and yet, it makes me so grateful for my life and what I have in it. Mission accomplished!

Stephen Durrant says

Müller is never an easy read, but I find her spare prose and bizarre vision of the world both impressive and deeply disturbing. Some reviewers have described this as a book about madness. Perhaps. The madness, if one can properly call it that, results from political dislocation and alienation. Irene, a Romanian German has fled her homeland to take up residence in West Germany, much like Müller herself. She becomes involved with three different men, none of whom seem particularly fond of her, and she wanders lost in her new, rather barren landscape. But for me it is always Müller's peculiar verbal style that engages. Passages like these appear on every page:

"The distance was in the eyes, too. And also later, when the refugees weren't walking in Flottenstrasse anymore. When they went to the post office, or talked too loudly on the phone from a rough neighborhood. And wrote signs of life on cards to another country" (p. 21).

"Thomas knew this boy with the peaked cap. He lived in every city. He was one of the many you lose track of while they are still alive" (p. 62).

"She opened her mouth as if to yawn. She didn't yawn. It was her way to line up the words in her mouth before she spoke" (p. 65).

Müller is a writer who sends me back to my German textbooks. Is there a greater compliment a reader can pay a writer than to want to read her in the original language?

Richard Leis says

It is terrible that I'm giving this only three stars, but I cannot say that I "really liked it" mostly because it was so difficult to read and comprehend. The book is about trauma told through the character Irene, a thirtysomething woman who can only perceive the world in fragments, dissolution, and dissociation. Thank goodness for my literature professor and his help in walking us through this book. There is a minimal plot if you hunt for it, about Irene moving out of Romania and to West Berlin. There she finds herself not only suffering from the trauma she experienced in Romania, but unable to form meaningful connections, even with the three men with whom she obliquely forms relationships.

The text is more poetry than prose, and it requires close reading and working through what a mind like Irene's might mean by her fragmented observations and figurative language. Her existence is in a present through which the past often intrudes. Sometimes she seems to observe someone that may not really be there, who may instead be a stand-in for herself, a self she also cannot seem to forge a connection with. Surreal images, imagination, and dreams also intrude into her fragmented reality.

There is no question that this book is depressing. Irene is a character who has suffered terribly. There are, I think, some brief glimpses of hope, but by design the effect of this book on the reader is one of disorientation, an attempt to get the reader to better understand how someone like Irene processes the world. For that, it is no wonder Herta Muller won the Nobel Prize in Literature; she truly tapped into a different way of telling a narrative, of providing point of view, of exploring the inner psyche of traumatized people. For that this is a book to value and to respect. This approach, however, doesn't make the experience all that pleasant. Instead, it reminds us that there are stories to be told that are not pleasant, by people damaged by fascism and violence, isolation and alienation, with little hope for their full recovery.

Elisa says

Dittature, paesi divisi e muri sono solo un pretesto per dire qualcos'altro. La vera protagonista di questo romanzo è l'alterità. L'abisso quasi insuperabile che circonda gli individui come un fossato, e li segue ovunque, naturale come un'ombra. Ci puoi mettere sopra un bel ponte, ma i ponti, col tempo, si deteriorano. L'abisso rimane lì.

È ingombrante e spietata, l'alterità, come una maledizione. Si insinua nella narrazione fratturandola, ci costringe a vedere la realtà come un insieme di stralci di quadro, una realtà che non scorre nel tempo ma nello sguardo della protagonista, a scatti come solo può procedere l'occhio umano, da un oggetto a un ricordo, da un ricordo a un uomo, da un uomo a un'aspettativa. Si traveste da divergenza di opinioni, di vedute, di orizzonti, da telefoni che squillano e vengono ignorati, da uomini che sbriciolano del pane per il solo gusto di farlo, mentre gli uccelli aspettano in disparte di poter banchettare, felici. Ma il suo travestimento più riuscito è quello da città. Relazionarsi con gli altri è sempre un viaggio. Richiede di sentire il freddo oltre i polpastrelli, come se toccassero la propria finitezza, impone di uscire dai propri limiti per cercare l'altro. Da una città familiare - per quanto anche la familiarità possa risultare odiosa - a un luogo sconosciuto. Quant'è bello il passo che precede la partenza: la città esiste già, ce la siamo inventati bene, dal suo nome abbiamo tratto sapori di frutta esotica e nomi di fiori mai visti. E poi, come la troviamo una volta arrivati? I giardini sono così profumati? I gesti e gli automatismi che guidano i passi dell'altro nella *sua* città diventeranno anche nostri o ci sarà sempre uno strappo tra noi e lui? Come sarà l'altro, una volta girato l'angolo? Come saremo noi?

Un sognatore vi dirà che sarà tutto bellissimo. Ma Herta Müller no, lei vi farà sentire che rumore fa il legno del ponte quando marcisce.

Hulya'nın diyor

“Boşlukta değil mi tehlikesi”..Biraz gitmek,biraz gidince parçalanmış mı? ya amaç “hatta gülüşlerine doyu gizlemek”

Bir yelcu,kökleri olan ama bedeniyle köklerinin ait olduğu yerler ayrı olmayan..

Herta Müller,taşıdığı yollardan çok ötürü duvarların arasına sıkışıyor..Ensesinde sürekli farklı nefesleri duyumsayan,bedenlerine yabancılaşmış damgası vurulmuş bireylere ait kelimeler bunlar.Derin ve bir o kadar sessiz..

Luana diyor

Viaggiatori su una gamba sola e sull'altra perduti. Viaggiatori che arrivano troppo tardi.

Di fronte a questo libro, commentare diventa un onere che si confonde in maniera ineluttabile con l'esperienza, la mia, di aver visto Berlino e il Muro; di aver visto tanti viaggiatori su una gamba sola che zoppicano per ritrovare un'identità geografica e culturale che hanno perso quando la cortina ha diviso cielo e terra mettendo da una parte l'Est e dall'altra l'Ovest come solo l'Onnipotente da millenni a questa parte si era permesso di fare.

I viaggiatori che vanno su una gamba sola, e vanno a stento, e vanno col peso nel cuore di non essere più nessuno non sono solo quelli che si trovavano di fronte al muro, ma sono quelli negli angoli che aspettano una cittadinanza, un posto nel mondo, un'appartenenza. Sentimenti lontani dalla mia culla di protezione che il mondo, le circostanze, la Storia in una congiunzione di coincidenze astrali favorevoli mi hanno offerto.. e che Herta Müller, scrittrice di fronte alla quale si può solo star zitti, atterriti, ed ascoltare, mi ha posto davanti senza mezzi termini.

Se c'era un modo crudo, disagiata di raccontarlo, Herta, donna Nobel, l'ha trovato e l'ha elargito per 169 pagine per raccontare la storia di Irene, che è poi la sua storia, donna che viaggia su una gamba sola dalla Romania alla Germania in cerca di se stessa. Di un perché. Di un amore da amare non di notte, non per soldi, non di sfuggita. Irene ha bisogno di legarsi, ed invece il mondo la tiene slegata, la storia, quella porzione di storia fredda ancora oggi così respirabile a Berlino, nell'Est, la tiene slegata dalla possibilità di un'identità propria.

Lo stile è tagliente. L'esperienza è tagliente. Il romanzo produce ferite che non si possono rimarginare e che, nonostante tutta la buona volontà, anziché avvicinare all'autrice, la rende ancora più lontana, più solitaria.

A Berlino hanno mantenuto in piedi chilometri di muro su cui dal 1989 in poi hanno dipinto murali mani provenienti da tutto il mondo che credono nella pace e hanno voglia di averla, ma in questa lunga fila c'è una breccia. Una breccia nel muro che ti permette di mettere la gamba ad Est, ed una gamba ad Ovest. L'ho fatto anche io, ovviamente. E mi sono sentita come se avessi una gamba sola. Ho sentito scendere su di me l'angoscia del non avere un'identità e di essere priva di un arto.

E se Herta Müller ha voluto scrivere un libro parlando di quanto si sta di merda ad andare da un posto all'altro con un bagaglio di coscienza troppo pesante e in più dovendosi poggiare su una gamba sola, io posso

solo approvare la sua scelta mandandole un abbraccio che non riceverà mai. Perché chi si guarda allo specchio e non si vede, non riuscirà nemmeno mai a sentire gli altri.

In finis, grazie ad Herta per tutto il dolore che mi ha messo addosso, perché mi ha restituito ancora maggiore consapevolezza su quel pezzo di storia che sta ancora in piedi alla Est Gallery, e nella mia incancellabile memoria.

soxundxso says

Schwerfällig reihen sich die klassischen SPO-Sätze aneinander. Subjekt, Prädikat, Objekt. Subjekt, Prädikat, Objekt. Spiegeln gepaart mit ein wenig poetischem Tiefsinn und verirrter Wörtchen die Stimmung der Reisenden wieder. Der Reisenden auf einem Bein.

Die Reisende ist Irene, eine junge Frau, die ihrem Heimatland Rumänien den Rücken kehrt und versucht in Westberlin Fuß zu fassen. Doch schon der Titel sagt: das gelingt nicht ganz. Hin und her gerissen zwischen Heimat und Fremde ist Irene selbst geteilt wie die Stadt. Ihr Leben geprägt von merkwürdigen Männergestalten, aufblitzenden Erinnerungen, grauen Straßen. Grau füllen sich auch die Seiten. Und ziehen sich. Bald fühlt sich der Leser in den wirren Zeilen verloren. Ist wie die Hauptfigur der Fremde ausgeliefert. "Reisende auf einem Bein" ist ein Roman, der verstehen lässt, wie es sich anfühlt zwischen den Stühlen - oder besser - zwischen zwei Ländern zu stehen. Aber er fordert Durchhaltevermögen. Denn auf einem Bein zu stehen ist mühsam.

Oana Kovacs says

Ciudatica si misterioasa, plina de subinteleuri si mesaje bine directionate, tipica Hertei Muller. Drama emigrantului roman care a scapat de comunism, dar nu si de umbra acestuia.

De la o relatie love&hate cu Herta Muller, am ajuns la a treia carte scrisa de ea si as zice ca am ajuns sa o citesc cu placere, trecand peste frustrarea maxima avuta la prima lectura.
