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Dieter Jonsson: Widersprüche–Hoffnungen. Literatur und Kulturpolitik der DDR–Die Prose Gunter Künerts

Anthony K. Munson
University of Minnesota

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Widersprüche--Hoffnungen: Literatur und Kulturpolitik der DDR--Die Prosa Günter Kunerts. By Dieter Jonsson. Literaturwissenschaft--Gesellschaftswissenschaft, 36. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978. 202 pages.

Jonsson's volume on Kunert's prose and GDR cultural policy is a well-organized and argued book whose topic is also quite timely. Jonsson analyzes several of Kunert's shorter prose works (those from Tagträume in Berlin und andernorts predominate) and elucidates in a careful, systematic exposition the philosophical deep-structures which form the basis for the content of the analyzed works. Several of these deep-structures document well the logic of Jonsson's argument that Kunert's thinking agrees with and perhaps originates from that of the philosopher Robert Havemann and the economist Uwe-Jens Heuer; they also indicate that Kunert and other specified members of the GDR's literary intelligentsia constitute, along with Havemann and Heuer, a portion of the group which Peter Ludz characterized in a sociological study as the "institutionalized counter-elite," or liberal opposition group within the SED's policy-making intelligentsia. Jonsson then juxtaposes the thinking of the "counter-elite" with that of the more conservative and politically predominant group in the SED, the "strategic leadership group." He points out in analyses of Brigitte Reimann's Ankunft im Alltag and Herbert Otto's Zeit der Störche that just as the deep-structures of Kunert's work are vitalized by the thinking of the counter-elite, so does the cultural political position of the more conservative group manifest itself in Reimann and Otto's works. Jonsson characterizes the non-literary thinking of this group chiefly in an analysis of the speech given by Walter Ulbricht at the second Bitterfeld Conference in 1964. Jonsson establishes that the two groups differ primarily in their answers to the questions of how and when the GDR will achieve its utopian destiny. According to Jonsson, the members of the "strategic leadership group" have adopted the position which Ulbricht took officially in 1964, viz., that a classless society has been realized in the GDR. This view derives from this group's definition of utopia which objectively equates an apparently arbitrary degree

of technical and economic progress with a practical utopia in GDR society. This equation is predicated on the further notions that: 1) the economic basis is reflected in the conscious superstructure; 2) the society is a collective whose interests are identical to those of the elite intelligentsia which determines the utopian standard; 3) each individual within the collective functions to implement unthinkingly the standards which the SED leadership establishes. The "counter-elite," as Jonsson represents its position, disagrees particularly with the equation of economic cause and utopian effect, since this equation is deterministic in its view of the reasoning subject.

As Jonsson demonstrates in his analyses of Kunert's prose, Kunert is concerned with achieving a humanitarian utopia: one which originates with and satisfies the needs and wants of individual members of society and not one that simply corresponds to abstract statistics which indicate that a utopia has been established. Thus Kunert advocates that the worker constantly measure his or her own needs against those which are being satisfied under the current program, and that he or she then actively contribute to the revision of the program so that it better corresponds to his or her needs and wants. It is a logical corollary of these ideas that Kunert's utopia is not a static but a dynamic one, for in Kunert's view it is the exchange of ideas, the constant readjustment of reality to accommodate the subject's needs which constitutes a utopian society. The differences between these ideas and those of the "strategic leadership group" have led to serious conflicts between the groups which Jonsson sketches in a general historical account of economic and cultural political developments between 1959 and 1966 in particular, and which he extends in a brief report of developments up to 1978. This account is especially interesting in view of Kunert's recent migration and gives some insights into possible reasons for it.

Jonsson's book places sometimes brilliant analyses of Kunert's shorter, opaque prose works and the thinking manifested in them in relation to the cultural political climate in the GDR and thus helps to illuminate the breadth and depth of Kunert's significance as a writer. Furthermore, its structuralist

approach provides one with an orientation to certain intellectual categories which, according to Jonsson's argument, would likely play a significant role in GDR fiction other than Kunert's or that of the other authors whose thinking is briefly treated here. My only argument with the book is that it does not deal with the non-literary positions of the "counter-elite" and "strategic leadership group" fully enough. Though Jonsson succeeds admirably in pointing out connections between literary and non-literary positions, he does not use enough evidence in his documentation of the latter to quell my suspicions that his ostensibly representative account of the two groups' positions is not in fact representative. Nevertheless, the book is full of information about Kunert and his works and may be regarded as a valuable initial study of the conflict between the "counter-elite" and the "strategic leadership group" in the GDR.

Anthony K. Munson
University of Minnesota

Anna Seghers. by Klaus Sauer. Autoren-
bücher 9. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1978.
183 pages.

Any book dealing with the literary career of an author as prolific and rich as Anna Seghers risks falling into bland but safe description, sweeping generalization, or a rehashing of ideas that have already been discussed better and more critically elsewhere. In this book, Anna Seghers, Klaus Sauer successfully avoids these pitfalls. He presents us with a thoughtful survey of Anna Seghers' life and work, stressing continuity without minimizing the complexities of change and development in her literary style and content. Unlike similar books, this one does not begin with the usual: "Anna Seghers was born..", but rather plunges into a comprehensive discussion of the author's views on: fascism, socialism, art, literature and humankind; these topics are developed in Seghers' novels and short stories from her earliest to the most recent. While this section is excellent it is not meant for the casual reader of Anna Seghers and may discourage those who cannot make connections. The second section is

the obligatory biography, which Sauer keeps brief and includes some interesting information not to be found elsewhere. Throughout the book, Sauer draws important connections between biographical and socio-historical events which help to understand some of the style and content of Seghers' literature. The blending of biographical and historical fact with its impact on aesthetic production is one of the strongest points in this book. The third and perhaps best section of Sauer's book deals with Seghers' concept of art and the role of the artist in society. While some things remain constant, Sauer highlights those changes that make Seghers' literary development an exciting, on-going process. There are discussions of her relationship to Georg Lukács, Rosa Luxemburg and the whole concept of spontaneity in literature and social change. Sauer offers insights into Seghers' stance to concepts such as: "Unmittelbarkeit der künstlerischen Phantasie", "Spontanität", and "literarisches Bewußtsein" --all very crucial aspects of Seghers' development. There is also an attempt made to deal with Seghers' strengths and weaknesses as a member of the literary establishment in the GDR of the 50's and 60's and the influence she had.

Sections four through six are divided according to time periods which are determined by historical events that effected profound changes in the author's life, attitudes, and literary style. While these sections are given continuity by developing certain key themes and ideas, the individual works are never pressed into a rigid mold, but rather each is approached with commendable freshness. In the last of these sections, the one dealing with her later works (1947-77), Sauer makes some cogent points regarding Die Entscheidung and Das Vertrauen, two novels written in the mode of socialist realism and generally ignored or rejected by western critics. Except for minor differences of interpretation or emphasis, this reviewer would wholeheartedly recommend Klaus Sauer's book to anyone interested in Anna Seghers. It captures the variety and depth of this author's work without oversimplification and adds a great deal toward understanding a complex and prominent German literary figure of the twentieth century.

Kay LaBahn
Washington University
