



Ingrid Scheffler. *Literatur im DDR-Hörfunk: Günter Kunert-Bitterfelder Weg-Radio Feature*. Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz - UVK, 2005. 311 S. EUR 29.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-89669-478-2.

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Literature on the Radio in the GDR

This edited volume contains three long essays on the role of literature in GDR radio broadcasts, covering a period from the early 1950s until the collapse of the SED regime. The volume does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of the function of literature on the GDR's radio stations, but rather offers three distinct approaches to this topic. The first essay, by Ingrid Pietrzynski, takes an author-centered approach, examining early radio works by the poet Günter Kunert in a range of genres. The second essay, by the editor Ingrid Scheffler, focuses on a particular period of the GDR's cultural history, the years of the "Bitterfelder Weg" (1959-64), the cultural program that sought to break down boundaries between art and life, between artists and workers, in order to assess the contribution of radio broadcasts to the promotion and production of literature that conformed to the official cultural policy of the time. In the third essay, Patrick Conley analyzes a specific genre of radio program, the "feature," and its relationship to other forms of broadcast and to literary production. The editor's introduction states that the unifying purpose of these three approaches is "das Untersuchen von medialen Arbeitsbedingungen von Literatur" as a means to establish "Information über das Verhältnis von Kunst und Staat" (p. 9). This activity, she argues, should be seen as a part of an ongoing "Aufarbeitung der DDR-Geschichte" (p. 9).

Pietrzynski's study is based on extensive archival research and presents a chronological account of Günter Kunert's work for the radio from 1953 until 1962. During this period, as Pietrzynski demonstrates using a wealth of unpublished sources, Kunert was involved in writing

programs and sometimes speaking in programs based on short satirical texts, his own poetry and that of other writers, reviews and general commentary on contemporary literary culture. Although Kunert began such work largely as a means of earning money, Pietrzynski carefully details how he began to explore the potential of the medium as a vehicle for bringing his own ideas about literature to a wider audience. The most interesting development, and the one which was to lead to Kunert's temporary banishment from the airwaves, was a series of collaborations with composer Kurt Schwaen, with whom he conceived and wrote a series of choral and operatic works heavily influenced, as Pietrzynski points out, by Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (1928-1930). The uproar caused by the radio opera *Fetzers Flucht* (1959) when it was reworked as a film for GDR television in 1962 led to the banning of Kunert's TV film *Monolog für einen Taxifahrer* (1962). As Scheffler argues, this experience contributed to his growing distance both from the officially sanctioned role of the writer as educator and the utopian hopes he had placed in the GDR regime. Pietrzynski's research is very thorough and will be invaluable to scholars investigating Kunert's work who either want to identify early texts in the relevant archives or simply to gain an impression of the kind of work that Kunert was doing in this period apart from his published literary texts. Pietrzynski wisely devotes much of her attention to the collaboration with Schwaen and points to some of the weaknesses in these Brecht-inspired texts. However, as she rarely quotes from these works or describes them in enough detail for the reader to be able to make her own judgment, the reader has to take the author's word for the validity of the qualitative

judgments offered here. Also, although a documentary value consists in the identification and description of the earlier texts, such as the satirical broadcasts, Pietrzynski does not really make a case for the importance of the material highlighted for an understanding of Kunert's work as a whole. Nevertheless, such argumentation is perhaps beyond the scope of Pietrzynski's account, and scholars working on Kunert will certainly be grateful to her for this well-documented overview.

Ingrid Scheffler's contribution is similarly based on archival research and seeks to situate the literature-related output of the GDR's radio stations, from broadcasts of author readings to adaptations of literary works and review programs, within the context of the Bitterfelder Weg. Scheffler does a good job of demonstrating the extent to which the choice of texts to be broadcast, the authors to be featured, and texts to be praised was determined by the official SED line on literature in this period (although she also points out how German "classics" could be rebranded to fit the correct ideological pattern). The most fascinating aspect of her study is her clear demonstration that the ideological hold on radio at this point in time was so tight that even writers who went into factories and recognized the distance between official doctrine and everyday reality still produced pieces for the radio that turned that experience into an affirmation of the state and its policies, bracketing out any problematic material. Another intriguing aspect of Scheffler's research, perhaps underdeveloped here, is the consideration of the acoustic elements in radio broadcasts that featured readings of Bitterfelder Weg literature. For example, Scheffler points out that although the work of professional authors working in industrial settings would generally be spoken by actors when broadcast on the radio, the work of amateur members of *Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter* groups would be spoken by the authors themselves, which had the effect of exposing its deficiencies more than might otherwise have been the case. For the most part, Scheffler is working with paper documents rather than recordings, due to the nature of the preserved material, but this question of the acoustic presentation of the literary texts themselves might have been explored more fully, as it would seem to constitute an essential feature of literature on the radio as opposed to on the page.

Patrick Conley's contribution, the shortest of the three, conducts a thematic analysis of the "feature," a genre of broadcast that had its own department in GDR

state radio beginning in 1964, but which is, as Conley shows, relatively difficult to define. At times adopting the conventions of the radio play, at times a montage of original recordings and scripted commentary, the defining aspect of these broadcasts, written either by literary authors or journalists, seems to have been their commissioning by the responsible department and an assumption that they contained some documentary element. Conley is, however, less interested in questions of form than in a content analysis of the material produced under this rubric. The main thrust of his argument is that the feature was generally a conformist and conservative form, one given much less freedom to tackle sensitive issues than the radio play. He shows, for example, how some writers were refused permission to address material that was more readily accepted when it was presented in a more clearly fictionalized guise as a radio play, or how some authors eventually preferred to present that material in literary texts when it proved too controversial for radio. This is an intriguing insight, suggesting a hierarchy of literary genres in terms of their deemed suitability for the presentation of controversial subject matter. What Conley does not investigate in depth are the reasons for these distinctions. It would have been interesting to hear what implicit or explicit judgments were being made (and by whom) in relation to the suitability of genres for certain material.

In terms of the volume's format, the editor might have created greater cohesion between the essays. It is noticeable, for instance, that the referencing system for published sources is slightly different in the first of the contributions and that Pietrzynski, when referring to works broadcast by Kunert, tends to give the details of manuscripts, whereas Scheffler and Conley give details of broadcasts, including the name of the radio station in question. The bibliographies, which vary in their organization, might have been more usefully integrated at the end of the volume for ease of use. No index of the authors referred to throughout the book is included, although it would have been a useful addition.

The strengths of this volume are its productive use of archival sources and stimulating breadth of approaches to the material. Given the diversity of the approaches, the volume does not offer a unified methodology for dealing with the relationship between literature and radio in the GDR, but certainly provides some productive points of departure for future research in this area.

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