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THE IMAGE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN CHRISTOPH HEIN'S WORK

**DAS BILD DES INTELLEKTUELLEN
IM WERK VON CHRISTOPH HEIN**

– Thesis summary –

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The scope and the object of the research. Theoretical and practical premises

This paper intends to analyze the prose work of the GDR author Christoph Hein from an interdisciplinary perspective. The main objective is to draft an image of Hein's intellectual prototype within the framework of a literary analysis, by exploring the general portrait of the intellectual in the latter part of the 20th century, especially in the GDR, from a social and historical point of view.

Among the figures of the German literature after the end of World War 2, one may find people from all social strata, having various professions and different typologies, such as outlaws, rebels, artists, ideologists, loners or seducers. In this literary mass of people the figure of the intellectual stands out. It reflects not only the social, but also the philosophical attempts during the post-war era to determine the place of the intellectual in a stigmatized society, to understand his resigned or critical attitude, to emphasize the cause for his weaknesses and the consequences of his acts, to answer still unclear questions that pose constant interest to the realm of research.

In the short-stories and novels of Hein the figures of intellectuals are more than the sociological and psychological illustration of a type, but are to be understood as their own reflection in their own cultural history, i.e. of the Third Reich and of German Democratic Republic. Despite the censorship imposed by the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), the literary work of Hein contains criticism upon the German civilization and the socialist regime. In such cases the author prefers the voice of chroniclers, a role in which he sees himself as author. As such he limits himself to the factual depiction of those events that are concealed by the SED regime from political reasons; he never makes any personal remarks or appeals to the reader. It is with the same distance that he describes the intimate love troubles of two lovers and the events that keep the entire world in suspense, such as the East Berlin rebellion of the workers from 17th June 1953 or the violent suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. His criticism lies therefore in the composition of the images.

Research objectives

This paper intends to analyze the image of Hein's intellectual in the context of the Real Socialism. The figures of his short stories and novels in their own life styles, their interpersonal relationships, their personal as well as professional decisions, their attitudes

towards the state ideology and the political system should be contrasted with the socialist ideology and the social order. Hence this paper is based on two research levels so as to prove the following assertion: the intellectual is condemned to failure and is fully aware of this situation. His failure is rooted in his individual peculiarities, as well as in the surrounding political system that allows him social criticism, which belongs to the figure of the intellectual, only under certain circumstances and to a limited extent.

The status of the research and personal contribution

The current level of the research and the personal contributions are emphasized in each chapter by means of footnotes, personal remarks and conclusions.

During the Cold War and beyond the Turnaround, Hein managed to draw the attention of exegetes upon himself not only in East but also in West Germany. Studies dedicated to Hein's literary work come from Lothar Baier, Bärbel Lücke, Philippe McKnight or Antje Janssen-Zimmermann (before the Turnaround), H  l  ne Guibert-Y  che, Andrea Hilbk, Christl Kiewitz, Sylvia Kloetzer or Albrecht Terrance (after 1989). These authors contributed decisively to the progress of text interpretations, since their examination of Hein's literary figures, among which many intellectuals can be found, serves as basis for the following research. This paper intends to be a continuation of the literary analysis of Hein's figures, emphasis being placed upon the continuous relativization of the image of the intellectual in the GDR, either in the private sphere of the individual, or in the political and historical context of the East-German society.

The structure of the thesis

The structure of the paper corresponds to the initially presented issue: starting from certain theoretical approaches on the position of the intellectual in the sociology of the 20th century we come to a more concrete text analysis, focusing on four prose texts, which in their themes and impact on the public characterize the author. The analyzed texts are the short story *Der fremde Freund* (1983) and the novels *Horns Ende* (1986), *Der Tangospieler* (1989) and *Frau Paula Trousseau* (2007). Although the story of the female painter Paula Trousseau, the eponymous heroine of the novel with the same title, was written and published almost two decades after the Fall of the Wall, the action is placed in the social and historical context of the GDR, whereas the contemporary criticism considers the novel a continuation and a consolidation of the main themes and motifs of the short story *Der fremde Freund*. The

previously mentioned texts of Christoph Hein depict a part of the GDR society after World War 2, which is characterized by a sense of disillusionment after the division of Germany, going hand in hand with the increasing distrust in the socialist leaders, who use Socialism as a pretext to come to power and remain there for the rest of their lives.

The first chapter of this paper, i.e. “The political, cultural and literary context in the German speaking area of the period 1949 – 1989”, examines the way in which the concept “GDR literature” appeared, as well as its peculiarities resulting from the political and social circumstances. The second chapter “The contribution of Christoph Hein to the GDR literature and his literary reception in the FRG” analyzes the way in which the East-German author managed to have such success with the West-German critics, readers and theatergoers. The third chapter, “The prototype of the GDR intellectual between ideological utopia and socialist reality” focuses on the sociological image of the intellectual of the 20th century, analyzing his relation to the Real Socialism of the GDR. The fourth chapter, as an introduction of the analysis of the intellectuals in Hein’s prose work, named “Hermann Kant, Christa Wolf and Volker Braun – creators of emblematic intellectual figures in the GDR literature” is intended as a frame for the following chapter. In the fifth chapter, “The emancipated woman in the GDR between intellectual recognition and social isolation: *Der fremde Freund* and *Frau Paula Trousseau*” one examines the position of the woman in the GDR, especially in the context of the woman emancipation propagandized by the SED regime as a fundamental prerequisite for the education of women and their access to the intellectual life within the Real Socialism. The two final chapters, “Three different theories as illustrations of the various attitudes of intellectuals during the Real Socialism: *Horns Ende*” and “The zero hour as Utopia: *Der Tangospieler*” focus on four intellectual figures of Hein that are confronted with social isolation, alienation complexes and political frustrations, whose stories are being used by Hein as a foundation for his social criticism.

Approaches and critical methods

The research I propose may be conducted as an investigation upon the way in which a series of concepts intersect and appear as a result of the tension, in which they are found. In order to give the paper a solid referential system one had to analyze first the primary literature, which means not only the above-mentioned texts, but also a deeper approach of the complete work of the author Christoph Hein. Furthermore, consulting several texts on the issue of the intellectual and the ideology of the Real Socialism was also necessary.

The critical apparatus of this paper serves first of all to the delimitation of the terminology and the clarification of the necessary fundamental distinctions. Similarly, the secondary literature represents a starting point for the text analysis and a highly important basis to emphasize the portraits of each intellectual figure in part. Thus an extremely useful tool was also represented by summaries and synopses.

Conclusions

The complexity of Hein's figures is based on the diversity and variety of artistic details. All the actions, thoughts and character traits are constantly linked to the origin of the characters, on the one hand and to the European context of the latter part of the 20th century, on the other hand. Among these literary figures the intellectuals represent a particular category, because they are the ones who feel the most the impact and repercussions of the Real Socialist political regime. Their impossibility to be part of the GDR political scene and to express their criticism against the SED regime also marks their private lives, their daily activities and the impression they leave in their circle, which finally leads to failure.

The evolution of the intellectuals in Hein's literary work corresponds therefore to the various sociological and political influences, which were emblematic to the GDR society. The old tradition and the European culture, the desire to overcome the national-socialist past, as well as the firm belief in the Socialism as the only way to the reconstruction of a new German society, all contribute to the emergence of a new type of intellectual, who is faithful to the Real Socialism, but still cannot bring about any "prolific changes in the GDR" (Christoph Hein). It is under these circumstances that Hein illustrates in his work all categories of the intellectual figures living in the Real Socialism.

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