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| Sabrina Canestrella | PhD Germanic and Slavic Studies – 3rd year |
| Sapienza Università di Roma | Karlova Univerzita - Praha |
| Advisor: Marco Rispoli | Co-Advisor: Josef Vojvodik |

Bio

Sabrina Canestrella obtained her Master's degree in Linguistic, Literary and Translation Sciences at Sapienza University of Rome in January 2020, with a thesis on German literature "Goethe and Zamjatin: Faustian Motifs and Figures of Evil between Germany and Russia" (Supervisor: Prof. Gabriele Guerra, Co-Rapporteur: Prof. Barbara Ronchetti). Thanks to the Erasmus programme, she spent a semester at the Freie Universität -Berlin attending courses in contemporary German literature and literary translation during her master's studies. During the second year of the PhD, the candidate spent the second semester doing research in Prague, at Charles's University. During the third year, by obtaining the scholarship "Ostpartnerschaften", she spent 4 months as a PhD guests at the Slawistik Institut of Leipzig University.

Ph.D candidate of the international programme "Germanic and Slavic Studies" (Sapienza University of Rome – Univerzita Karlova Praha), her doctoral thesis "Die Vielstimmigkeit als Häresie: Systemkritik, Resistenz und Subversion in der DDR-Literatur", proposes to rethink the concept of "heresy" as a hermeneutic instrument for the examination of some significant works in the history of the DDR: *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1972) by Ulrich Plenzdorf, *Die wunderbaren Jahre* (1976) by Reiner Kunze and *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* (1985) by Volker Braun. The thesis maintains a comparative approach due to the transversal nature of the topic and carries out a chiasmatic analysis with other works from the Soviet socialist hemisphere: *Zvezdnyj bilet* (1961) by Vasilij Aksenov and *Den'opricnika* (2006) by Vladimir Sorokin, to which a final appendix is dedicated. Besides the literature of the GDR and contemporary Russian literature, her other major areas of interest are German Romanticism, the lyricism of Paul Celan and the research on Faust-Stoff. While maintaining a focus on the German-speaking world, the research maintains a strong comparative approach, having devoted part of the bachelor's and master's studies also to Russian literature.

Articles:

[11573/1709197](#) - 2024 - **Percorsi eretici e strade (dis)simili in Ulrich Plenzdorf e Vasilij Aksenov**

Canestrella, Sabrina - 04b Atto di convegno in volume

congresso: Crisi, giovinezza e critica all'adulità / Krisen, Jugend und die Kritik am Erwachsensein (Villa Vigoni)

libro: Crisi, giovinezza e critica all'adulità / Krisen, Jugend und die Kritik am Erwachsensein - (979-12-81641-02-0)

[11573/1600303](#) - 2021 - **Locus Amoenus: A Lexicon of Contrasts in Adam und Evelyn**

Canestrella, Sabrina - 01a Articolo in rivista

rivista: ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF MODERN PHILOLOGY (Wrocław: Oddział Polskiej Akademii Nauk we Wrocławiu) pp. 25-34 - issn: 2299-7164 - wos: WOS:000744198300002 (0) - scopus: (0)

[11573/1649056](#) - 2021 - **Francesco Camera (a cura di), Celan. Incontri, voci e silenzi nello spazio della poesia, «Nuova Corrente», 166 (2020)**

Canestrella, Sabrina - 01d Recensione

rivista: STUDI GERMANICI (Roma: Istituto italiano di studi germanici, 1979/80- Roma: Herder Editrice e Libreria Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1963- Firenze: Sansoni, 1935-) pp. - - issn: 0039-2952 - wos: (0) - scopus: (0)

Polyphony as Heresy: System Critique, Resistance, and Subversion in GDR Literature

Aim of the dissertation is to show that the concept of heresy can be considered a productive category model for the analysis of specific literary phenomena that shaped the GDR-Literature. In particular, analysing the historical and political context of the second half of the “Jahrhundert der Nacht”¹, in which the socialist ideology is institutionalized and develops its effect in the cultural sphere, the dissertation will pinpoint the topicality of this polyphonic phenomenon, too often considered anachronistic in the contemporary word. The first part of the dissertation is devoted to the development of the theoretical and methodological framework, which I will apply later in the study. Since the 1980s, numerous disciplines, sociology being among them, have studied the concept of heretic and introduced many possibilities for nonreligious rethinking of heresy and its enormous potential for social progress. From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu is undoubtedly among those who have contributed most to the analysis of the phenomenon. By defining, above all, the relationship between Orthodoxy and Heresy with his *Doxa*, Bourdieu lays the groundwork for a new interpretative theory capable of connecting sociology and literature in two fundamental texts, namely *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972) and in *Questions de sociologie* (1980). All later research, such as those conducted in the 1980s by Georg Zito and Lester Kurz to examine the connection between social pressure and individual freedom, are based on the work of Bourdieu. Zito aims to demonstrate that heresy is a highly productive semiotic schema that should be understood as a social and institutional phenomenon in general rather than having a true religious significance by working within the theoretical framework laid out by Bourdieu. Lester

¹ Patočka, Jan, “Le guerre del XX secolo e il XX secolo come guerra”, in id, *Saggi eretici sulla filosofia della storia* (Kacirské eseje o filosofii dějin [1975]), Torino: Einaudi, (1981) 2008, S. 133.

Kurz contributes to this issue by examining several aspects of the process of defining heresy and attempting to elucidate how this process affects the structure of social institutions and the content of belief systems. It is precisely this system that benefits from the heretic, the deviant insider, because, through its existence, it can prove the correctness of its values.

Parallel to this process of the sociology of heresy, the first attempts at aesthetic and literary analysis developed in the Slavic field. One of the first scholars to study the concept of heresy in literature at the end of the 20th century was Walter Koschmal. In his work „Zur häretischen Ästhetik in der russischen Gegenwartsliteratur“², he draws a contrast between traditional and heretical aesthetics. Complementing Wolfgang Iser's concept of „Ästhe/tik“ with Aage Hansen-Löve's idea of heresy as a system of symbols³, Koschmal conducts what might be called a phenomenological analysis by examining the work of some of the most important Russian authors of the second half of the 20th century (such as Viktor Erofeev and Vladimir Sorokin). Koschmal examines Iser's concept of the "aesthetic imperative" and notes that, in traditional aesthetics, the imperative leads to a suppression of the categories of the sensual and consequently to an "antisinnlichen Absolutismus". According to Koschmal, this aesthetic imperative specifies which treatment of sensuality is permissible and correct by demanding and encouraging the overcoming of the primary-vital desire for perception and sensual sensation⁴.

This "Ethik der Unterdrückung" is opposed to the heretical notion according to which the artist behaves "по закону художественного суждения"⁵ - namely "according to the right of artistic judgement". The aesthetics of functionality of Socialist Realism did not allow for an opening and an escape to the rear. Instead, this realism demanded a "truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development⁶, which should remain within the limits of the tested creative method⁷. According to Fritz J. Raddatz, this aesthetic leads to a renunciation of the search for values in favour of a growing attention to *locations* as places in which the socialist man is realised – as a result, Raddatz talks about an Ästhetik der Ortfindung⁸. It is precisely on the concept of reality that it is necessary to reflect, because all the operations of the cultural policy of the GDR go in this direction. The concept of "truth" then stands in opposition to that of "reality", but it is the subjective and everyday truth of the individual human being who is a part of the socialist world, not the dogmatic truth of Marxist-

² Koschmal, Walter, „Zur häretischen Ästhetik in der russischen Gegenwartsliteratur“, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 41 (1996), 381-399.

³ In zwei wesentlichen Arbeiten beschäftigte sich Aage Hansen-Löve mit dem Thema Häresie und Häresie in der russischen Literatur: „Hermetik vs Häretik: Heterodoxien“, in Erika Greber; Bettine Merke (Hrsgs.), *Manier-Manieren-Manierismen*, Tübingen: Narr, 2003; *Der Russische Symbolismus*, Wien, Verl. d. Österr. Akad. d. Wiss., 1998.

⁴ Iser, Wolfgang, „Ästhe/thik. Ethische Implikationen und Konsequenzen der Ästhetik“, in Wulf, Christoph; Kamper, Dietmar; Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich (Hrsgs.), *Ethik der Ästhetik*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994, S. 6.

⁵ Koschmal, Walter, „Zur häretischen Ästhetik in der russischen Gegenwartsliteratur“, *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 41 (1996), S. 381.

⁶ Skaterščikov, V. K., *Grundlagen der marxistisch-leninistischen Ästhetik*, (Osnovy marksistko-leninskoi estetiki, 1961) Berlin: Verl. Volk und Wissen, 1976, S. 652.

⁷ *Ebd.* S. 652. Es wurde hier ein Teil des Statuts des Schriftstellerverbandes der Sowjetunion zitiert.

⁸ Raddatz, Fritz J., „DDR-Literatur und marxistische Ästhetik“, *German Review*, 1 (1968), S. 44.

Leninist doctrine. As a result, one speaks about a unique, flexible, and varied truth. According to Koschmal, one of the domains in which there is the greatest separation from conventional aesthetics and dogmas is that of individuality. Examining the Russian literature of the second half of the 20th century, he identifies the characteristics of the so-called heretical aesthetic and was able to delineate three areas in which the gap between the two aesthetics becomes clear: the glorification of the individual, the emphasis on the present and the importance of sensuality. In the German contemporary context, the topic was first explored in the late 1980s when Eitel Timm published his work *Ketzer und Dichter. Lessing, Goethe, Thomas Mann und die Postmoderne in der Tradition des Häresiegedankens* (1989). Although it does not offer a complete overall picture, it does provide some interesting food for thought. Timm analyses the development of heresy in postmodernism and identifies the origin of the conflict of contemporary man in the opposition between individual and institution. Because of the industrial culture, the power of institutions has become so strong that even the most mature individual has no choice but to be consumed by the prevailing institutions. According to Timm, the prototype of this problematic relationship in the 19th century is already Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, who denies man's arbitrariness. From here onwards begins the new path of the heretics, which is increasingly linked to the political sphere. At this point, going through the intersection between political and religious field, the research deals with the work of political scientists such as Trier, Carl Schmitt and Hildermeier, who played a significant role in proposing a new semantics for the concept of heresy by drawing analogies between totalitarian ideologies like Marxism-Leninism and religious belief's systems and defining concepts of "state" and "politic".

Precisely because of the transversal force of this concept and its close relationship to the sphere of power, to what's granted and what's forbidden, and to the formation of truth, I believe that the instrument of heresy has a particularly relevant value in the analysis of certain literary phenomena that occurred in East Germany and the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century. The selection of writers and pieces under analysis stems from the knowledge that there are unnoticed links between each of them – be they stylistic, thematic, or historical-political contexts. This methodological tool relied heavily on Bourdieu's semiotics and his concept of the "field," to which the analysis constantly seeks to approach in order to generate another field—heresy—that is transversal to those already mentioned by the selected authors.

Each of the research's chapters was conceptualized as a component of the cultural and symbolic system that Hansen-Löve first discussed in the 1990s, identifying in this idea a very interesting area for examination. Since the years following the construction of the Berlin Wall, we have seen how the boundaries of what is permitted or forbidden has been constantly shifting, as if we were witnessing a constant updating of an index of prohibited subjects. It is impossible to treat such a fluid subject as literature – particularly the literature of two socialist countries with direct influence on one another – separately, as the work's introduction already hinted at. This is why the research chose not to concentrate only on the GDR.

The first segment of our heretical landscape is constituted by the thematization of the gap between generation and the rebellion of the “sons”. The youth of the late 1950s and early 1960s, embodied in two literary movements, the *molodaja proza* in the Soviet Union and the *Anpassungsliteratur* in East Germany, are the earliest protagonists of this heretical constellation. Disorientation, search for an existence and remarks on the possibilities of the individual in society are core motifs of the prose of this decade, which is why terms such as "new subjectivity" are often used to talk about the literature of this period⁹. The search for this new subjectivity directly influences the creation of the novels' new hero: the protagonist is now a rebel that finds itself of the society, with conflicts that will never allow a reconciliation. In a strongly dogmatic context such as that of socialism, the break-up of youth becomes a thorn in the side, an annoying side-effect that manifests its dissent and seeks a union between ideal and reality, individual and collectivity. In this context find themselves *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1972) by Ulrich Plenzdorf and *Zvezdnyj bilet* (1961) by Vasilij Aksenov. The analysis shows how the dualism between orthodoxy and heresy and its centrality from a sociological point of view are fundamental to the fates of the rebels, not only the young ones, however: alongside Edgar and Dima, both 16 years old, appears Viktor, Dima's thirty years old brother, engaged in a personal and rather complex opposition to the upper echelons of the university where he works. All three, indistinctly, rebel against the »Schaufenster-Kultur«, to which they instead oppose spontaneity and a desire to experience reality in all its aspects. Furthermore, the analysis showed how Bourdieu's concept of “capital” is central to the understanding of what is happening. The field of power thus returns to dominate the vicissitudes of the characters, between the permitted and the forbidden, and it is precisely for this reason that Viktor's rebellion is intolerable for the system: his is a heresy that jeopardizes the tightness of the academic system of favors and corruptions, it cannot be tolerated because he is the bearer of greater symbolic capital than the two adolescents. The element of experience and the desire to perceive oneself through sensuality, which Koschmal describes as two elements of heretical aesthetics, are present in both Plenzdorf and Aksenov. According to Koschmal, perception is an integral part of the concept of *Aisthesis*. His conception of the term is based on the studies of Wolfgang Welsch from the 1990s, in which the German philosopher coined the term "Ästhet/hik" to illustrate the hybridization and commonality of the two concepts of ethics and aesthetics, noting that the etymology of the term *Aisthesis* relates both to the sphere of perception (*Wahrnehmung*) - which is based on living and real elements, everyday life, so to speak: colours, sounds, aromas, noises - as well as to the concept of sensation (*Empfindung*). These are precisely the spheres in which the two young people move, albeit in different ways: Edgar indulges in feelings, sometimes ironically, but always profoundly linked to a feeling of inadequacy and discomfort that lead him to wander continually; in Dima, on the other hand, the world

⁹ Max, Katrin: „Auf der Suche nach der Rebellion. Bürgertums-Imitatio als Adoleszenzerfahrung in der DDR-Literatur der 1970er Jahre (Plenzdorf, Brock, Kunze)“, in Tommeck, Heribert; Steltz, Christian (Hrsgs.), *Vom Ich erzählen. Identitätsnarrative in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am M., Peter Lang, 2016, S. 165-186.

around him acquires importance in its ability to arouse the senses: smells, colours, flavours, everything must be experienced in order to escape from the already written everyday life.

If Plenzdorf and Aksenov situate themselves within the canonical boundaries of heresy, with Reiner Kunze's analysis we move closer to a broader conception of the term, based on the idea of a connection between lost and endangered souls. Above all, in Kunze's poetics, the protagonist is man in all his individuality, not the abstract and collective being of the Sowjetmensch, but rather the soul of the individual. The overcoming of the dogmatic positive hero is almost taken for granted in the work of an author who lives and breathes thanks to his ability to fly beyond imposed limits, such as those separating the GDR from the then Czechoslovakia. Having approached Czech poetry out of love, Kunze soon became one of its most ardent supporters and mediators in Germany. Translation is precisely the main weapon he has at his disposal to oppose the regime because it allows him to transport as yet unknown concepts to his homeland, such as that of a humane socialism that is the basis of the Prague Spring and that is brutally defeated with the entry of Soviet troops. The author encapsulates all his melancholy in *Die wunderbaren Jahre*, the collection examined in the research. Published in 1976 in West Germany, this collection allows Kunze's existentialist tendency, by his own admission derived directly from Albert Camus, to be combined with Patočka's »Solidarität der Erschütterten«. What prevails in them, after all, is the possibility of renewal as *fil rouge*, of light at the end of the tunnel, beyond the absurd, constituted here by the greyness of Soviet reality and the indoctrination that starts at an early age and creates young generations of manichean divisions. Kunze creates a universe of young characters, teenagers whose lives we know thanks to these short narratives that illuminate a moment of their existence to highlight the contradiction of their time and then immediately abandon it. Living in the *absurd*, Kunze's children show the effects of indoctrination through everyday life's objects and children's toys: soldiers, minicars, books, etc. False promises and corrupt ideologies form the basis of these young people's lives. These fragments of everyday life reveal the state's mistrust of its citizens and the stigmatisation of the slightest attempts at resistance: the odd centre partings, the dark clothes, the nickel glasses - all of these give a false image of the regime and must therefore be suppressed. The power evoked by Kunze's imagery is extraordinarily powerful and is accentuated by minimalist prose, with its ironic and dramatically realistic language that creates two fronts: friends and enemies – the based opposition of every government and necessary fuel for the conflict. The framework within which the analysis of Reiner Kunze's work has been conducted are those identified by Jan Patočka in the mid-seventies in his last philosophical writing, *Ketzerische Essays über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. Published in 1975 by samizdat, the philosopher engages in a reflection on the meaning of history in postmodernity, noting how it is perhaps necessary to reverse our starting point: to see tragedy and war not as anomalies in our otherwise peaceful existence, but as integral parts to the influence of history and the development of the individual. What links Patočka's phenomenological philosophy and Kunze's poetics is the notion of freedom.

It is precisely with the intersection of socialism and reality that we want to begin this third section in order to continue with the description of that heretical constellation that now seems to find its

natural fulfilment in one of the best-known authors of recent German literature and the political scene of the GDR, Volker Braun. His transition of Hegel's Herr-Knecht-motif allows us to further understand the importance of heresy in the process of the individual's self-determination. The relationship of the individual with socialist society and history, always present in Braun's poetics, becomes the central focus of the *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*. Published in 1985, the novel pinpoints the short-circuit of the overlapping concept of "state" and "society" through the expression »im gesellschaftlichen Interesse«, a constant question in the protagonists' reflections that, however, is never answered. Braun's subversive attitude is expressed in every aspect of the novel, both stylistically and in terms of content. Fragmented and chaotic, the narrator's tale evolves out of the two men's car journeys, on whose shoulders echoes the reference (later made explicit) to Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*. Leerstelle, incomplete paragraphs and thematic range are the characteristics that form the 'subversive realism' of which Braun himself feels representative and which he employs to oppose the dictates of the still prevailing real socialism. Even in the 1980s, the SED attempted, albeit to a lesser extent, to steer cultural policy, and as a result the sale of the novel was twice blocked. Through the dialectic of the Herr-Knecht motif, Braun highlights the criticality of a system that crushes the individual, showing the inadequacy of the ruling class in the figure of Kunze, but also the passive attitude of Hinze, who never attempts to break out of his minority status. By quoting Marx and Lenin, Braun wants to stimulate the reader to take a stand, in view of the possibility of a new world. The possibility of this new globe of social equality of opportunity is lost in the dictates of an ideology that justifies everything, even rapes, in the name of social interest. Collective and individual interests become intertwined when Kunze uses his position as a civil servant to coerce women into sex and to convince Hinze to give him his wife, Lisa. The toxic machismo that Kunze carries throughout the novel is shattered when he meets Lisa, the only character who develops within the fabula. Due to the multitude of theoretical coincidences and similarities the original hypothesis has become increasingly supported and what Hansen-Löve called a "symbolic system" of heresy has become clear. The phenomenon of the rise of Marxism, its institutionalisation and the consequent emergence of dogma is clear evidence of the need for a break in the historical process of development.

The epistemological framework outlined above has allowed us to rethink heresy by pinpointing what seems to be its main feature in the contemporary era: heterogeneity. From the mid-1960s to the end of the 1990s, the domain of what is considered heretical shifts, always depending on a specific socio-political context. Because of its inherent subversive power, the heretic model remains a key structure for sociological and literary analysis. Although its boundaries are gradually disappearing, it is a disintegration that allows for a reorganization of the field. Finally, in the final section of the thesis a remaining question has raised: is it still plausible to discuss about heresy in the atomised world? Without a binary structure and no reference points, how can we define what is heretic? Aware that this concept is not doomed to oblivion, the appendix of the work proposes a new interpretation, showing how in the last century the concept of heresy has returned to its etymological meaning of *choice*.