

Anna Seghers: The Mythic Dimension
Helen Fehervary
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Anna Seghers

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The Mythic Dimension

HELEN FEHERVARY

Ann Arbor

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Preface

My ability to conduct research and to see the writing of this book through to completion owes a great deal to individuals and institutions, and to each and all I express my gratitude. The National Endowment for the Humanities supported archival research in Berlin in 1994 with a Summer Stipend and Travel Allotment within the Initiative on the Emergence of Democracy. A three-month Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Research Study Grant allowed me to continue library and archival research in the fall of 1994. Archival research in Budapest in 1997 was made possible by a Research Travel Grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). The support of the Ohio State University College of Humanities and Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures allowed me to embark on my project with the award of a Faculty Professional Leave for the year 1993–94. College Grants-in-Aid in 1994 and 1996 helped fund research travel, and my department made possible additional travel support and adjustment in my teaching schedule. The staff of the Humanities Information Systems came to my aid in the conversion to a new programming system, and my continued education in electronics under the guidance of my colleague Gregor Hens was made altogether bearable by his serene company.

A number of people enabled me to conduct sustained research in archives and libraries. I acknowledge in particular the cooperation of the knowledgeable staff at the Akademie der Künste–Berlin am Robert-Koch-Platz, where I worked in 1994 and in years following, especially Renate Graßnick, who was responsible for the collection in the Anna-Seghers-Archiv until her retirement in 1999. Special thanks go to Marianne Berger of the Anna-Seghers-Gedenkstätte in Berlin-Adlershof for her readiness to respond to inquiries, whether in person, by mail, or by telephone, and above all for her keen interest in my project and trust in me, permitting me to work in the Seghers library undisturbed in 1994 and subsequent years in search of inscriptions, notations, and other clues among

the over nine thousand books stacked in double rows on shelves reaching from floor to ceiling. The work was tedious, the findings all the more delightful, and without them, this would have become, if at all, an altogether different book.

I also express thanks to Friedrich Schütz, Director of the Stadtarchiv Mainz, for clarifying information pertaining to the history of the Reiling family; to Erdmut Wizisla, Director of the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv in Berlin, for allowing me access to a variety of materials over the years; to the archival and library staff who assisted me at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Petöfi Literary Museum, and the Széchenyi Library in Budapest; to László Sziklai and his staff at the Georg Lukács Archive and Library in Budapest; and especially to the Mannheim and Radványi scholar Éva Gábor, who generously gave of her time and provided insight concerning the Budapest Sunday Circle.

I am indeed fortunate to have had conversations over the years with individuals who knew Seghers intimately: Christa Wolf, Steffie Spira, Stephan Hermlin, and Seghers's children, Pierre Radvanyi and Ruth Radvanyi. I am particularly indebted to Ruth Radvanyi for generously giving of her time and offering hospitality in Berlin. I also wish to acknowledge Sonja Hilzinger for her interest in my work from the very start, and for the same, the scholars in the Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft in Berlin, above all Frank Wagner, whose discernment and friendship did much to spur me on.

Here in the United States I have been heartened over the years by the interest and support of friends and colleagues; special thanks are due David Bathrick, Sander Gilman, Jost Hermand, Patricia Herminhouse, Robert Holub, Leila Rupp, Egon Schwarz, Marc Silberman, and Frank Trommler. Peter Beicken and Arpad Kadarkay kindly read the manuscript in the summer of 1999 when it was in its last stages. I am especially grateful to David Hayes, whose humanity and wit encouraged me to continue on a journey that took me into ever more uncharted territories; and to Erika Bourguignon, who read early drafts of the chapters and whose insights as an American anthropologist born in Vienna lent our discussions wide-ranging life perceptions and more than occasional good humor. I owe particular thanks to the series editor, Geoff Eley, for his initial interest and confidence in the manuscript, and to Liz Suhay of the University of Michigan Press for seeing it through the review process and offering sound editorial advice and encouragement.

Finally, I express my gratitude to Georgine Kopeczek Biedermann for help with some of the more subtle nuances of the Hungarian language; and to Maria Corvera Fehervary for countless hours of reviewing, rethinking, and reformatting, allowing me to be brought up to date at long last in the language of the computer—and no less for her request years ago

that I read her *that* story: Anna Seghers's *Shelter*, about a German boy who loses his parents to the Nazis and is taken in by a French working-class family in Paris. The story hardly worked the more familiar wonders of the fairy tales, but it nonetheless became part of our household's new "canon," adding significantly to my appreciation of Seghers and thus providing a kernel of sorts for the later project of this book.

But the first idea for the topic, particularly for chapters 4–6, goes further back, to a casual remark made by Ferenc Fehér in the mid-1970s when I visited him and Ágnes Heller in Budapest. "You know, there are many interesting things in Lukács's life and his papers that have to do with Anna Seghers," he offered. "You're Hungarian, after all; you know the language; you should know there's quite a topic you could write about here." No, I didn't know, and in my youthful exuberance about more burning matters, I didn't much care. Years later I happily remembered Feri's words. To his memory, and to that of the other "wayfarers" who haunt its pages, this book is dedicated.

The following articles that I published during the course of my research contain the prolegomena to some of the ideas that are elaborated upon and transported into entirely new contexts in the separate chapters of this book: "Anna Seghers's *Seelenmalerei* and the Mannerism of Heiner Müller's Theatre," in *Responsibility and Commitment: The Ethics of Cultural Mediation*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn, Robert C. Holub, and Klaus R. Scherpe (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 225–41; "Brecht, Seghers, and *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*—with a Previously Unpublished Letter of 1952 from Seghers to Brecht," *The Brecht Yearbook* 21 (1996): 20–47; "Die Seelenlandschaft der Netty Reiling, die Stimmen der Jeanne d'Arc und der Chiliasmus des Kommunarden László Radványi," *Argonautenschiff: Jahrbuch der Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft* 5 (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1996): 118–36; and "Landscapes of an *Auftrag*," *New German Critique* 73, special issue on Heiner Müller, ed. David Bathrick and Helen Fehervary (winter 1998): 115–32. The relevant sources are acknowledged in the pertinent notes to the chapters. I wish to thank *New German Critique* for permission to reprint in revised form passages from my article on Seghers and Heiner Müller (*NGC* 73, winter 1998) in chapter 6; and *The Brecht Yearbook* for permission to reprint in revised form sections of my article on Seghers and Brecht (*Brecht Yearbook* 21, 1996) in chapter 8.

The preparation of a text-critical, annotated, and commentated edition of Seghers's works using a text base of first editions is only just under way (Anna Seghers, *Werkausgabe*, 24 vols., ed. Helen Fehervary and Bernhard Spies, [Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2000–]). Where possible I have quoted from published English translations. Otherwise I have relied on the

reprint editions of individual novels published by Aufbau Taschenbuchverlag since 1993 and the six-volume Aufbau Taschenbuchverlag edition *Erzählungen 1924–1980* of 1994. These editions use the same text base as the fourteen-volume *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben* authorized by Seghers and published by Aufbau Verlag between 1977 and 1980. The edition *Erzählungen 1924–1980* also includes previously unpublished texts. Where I have quoted from Seghers's essays, my main source has been Anna Seghers, *Über Kunstwerk und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Sigrid Bock, 4 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970–71, 1979).

Unpublished letters and other archival materials quoted are so acknowledged in the pertinent notes. I am grateful to the following for permission to quote from such materials: Anna Seghers's and László Radványi's heirs, Dr. Pierre Radvanyi (Paris) and Dr. Ruth Radvanyi (Berlin); Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, Anna-Seghers-Archiv und Gedenkstätte and Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv; Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Filozófiai Intézet, Lukács György Archivum és Könyvtár; and Petöfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Ruth Radvanyi, Berlin, for permission to reproduce the original photograph of Netty Radvanyi (Anna Seghers), 1925, and Joachim Cmok, graphic artist, Berlin, for photographic reproduction. Acknowledgment is further made to the British Museum for permission to reproduce *The Three Trees* by Rembrandt; the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden for permission to reproduce *The Jewish Cemetery at Ouderkerk* by Jacob van Ruisdael; the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, for permission to reproduce *The Landscape with the Spruce Branch* by Hercules Seghers and *Ecco Homo* and *Study after Leonardo's Last Supper* by Rembrandt; the Musée Jacquemart-André for permission to reproduce *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1629, by Rembrandt; the Louvre for permission to reproduce *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1648, by Rembrandt; the Rijksmuseum-Stichting Amsterdam for permission to reproduce *Christ in Emmaus*, 1654, and *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple*, 1654, by Rembrandt; the Bibliothèque nationale de France for permission to reproduce *Christ Preaching (La petite tombe)* by Rembrandt; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art for permission to reproduce *Head of Christ (Portrait Study of a Young Jew as Christ)*, attributed to Rembrandt.

A time-consuming task in the preparation of this book has been that of translation. A significantly large number of sources from which I quote are not yet available in English. These involve above all Seghers's shorter narratives, essays, and letters, on which I draw in all eight chapters, as well as published sources and unpublished archival materials in German and Hungarian from which I quote especially in chapters 4–6. Wherever possible I have relied on existing English translations, as in the case of Seghers's

novels *The Seventh Cross*, *Transit*, and *The Dead Stay Young* and her narrative *The Revolt of the Fishermen*; and on translated works by Lukács, Benjamin, Brecht, and others. All published translations from which I quote are acknowledged in the notes to the individual chapters. Where I have deemed it necessary to make alterations in the translations, these adjustments are likewise accounted for in the notes. Unless thus indicated, all translations from German and Hungarian are my own.

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