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Alfred Andersch, Martin Walser and the Süddeutscher Rundfunk

The collaboration of Martin Walser and Alfred Andersch at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart, epitomised notably by their efforts to promote the work of Arno Schmidt, marked a high point in the creation of a specifically West German literature in the 1950s. The ‘Radio-Essay’ programme and the parallel publication of Andersch’s periodical Texte und Zeichen brought together most of the significant figures of the Gruppe 47 and helped to shape the literary tastes of a generation of post-war West Germans. The period also witnessed the early literary successes of both Walser and Andersch, and the end of their collaboration signalled a shift of emphasis in post-war writing.

Martin Walser and Alfred Andersch first met, by chance it seems, at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk on 19 August 1952. The meeting was a propitious one. Arno Schmidt had come to Stuttgart to hear the radio version of his Gadir oder Erkenne dich selbst. Andersch, who had already reviewed Schmidt’s Leviathan for the ‘Bücherstunde’ of the Hessischer Rundfunk under the title ‘Ein Genie!’, was anxious to acquire material for his ‘studio frankfurt’ series. Schmidt was just as anxious to place two works, ‘Die Umsiedler’ and ‘Alexander’, which had been turned down by Rowohlt.1 Andersch returned to Frankfurt with two manuscripts which were to appear in 1953 as the sixth volume of his ‘studio frankfurt’ under the title die umsiedler. 2 prosastudien, and it was the unwillingness of Eugen Kogon to publish Schmidt’s ‘Kosmas’ as a later volume in the series, together with the financial difficulties facing the Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, which prompted Andersch’s approaches to the Luchterhand Verlag and the eventual founding of the periodical Texte und Zeichen. Walser’s involvement as a radio producer was a significant fact in Schmidt’s reception and Walser’s presence in Stuttgart must have been a factor in Andersch’s decision to move from Hamburg to the SDR in May 1955. The discovery of Arno Schmidt was due in no small part to the combined efforts of Martin Walser and Alfred Andersch, and it seems entirely appropriate that Schmidt should have been the figure who presided over their first meeting in 1952.

The aim of this essay is not to argue that there was intense literary collaboration between Andersch and Walser; nor is it to assert the significant influence of one writer on another. Its aim is more circumscribed, namely to trace the brief overlap of their careers during the mid-1950s and to assert that their co-presence in Stuttgart, together, of
course, with the many talents of others, helped to make that radio station a significant factor in post-war West German writing. The departure of Andersch and Walser from Stuttgart (stimulated in part by the removal of Fritz Eberhard as Intendant) marked a parting of the ways in other respects, politically and aesthetically. It also marked the end of what had been a highly productive phase in post-war West German writing in which the radio-play and feature offered writers unique opportunities, both financial and literary, even as they were developing their literary careers.

The relationship between Andersch and Walser was from the outset an unequal one, not least because of their respective ages and backgrounds. When they met, in 1952, Andersch, then in his late thirties, was already an established literary and media figure, a co-founder of the Gruppe 47 and author of Die Kirschen der Freiheit, which was to appear in October 1952, less than two months after their meeting. Andersch had begun his successful media career on 1 August 1948, when he joined Radio Frankfurt (later to become the Hessischer Rundfunk) as producer and editor of its Abendstudio programme. In 1949 he had edited a collection of essays entitled Europäische Avantgarde, and planned, early in 1950, to produce a special number of the Neue Rundschau in order to introduce to his radio audience texts by those contemporary German authors whom he admired: Schnurre, Krolow, Weyrauch, Böll, Arno Schmidt and Ernst Schnabel. This series failed to materialise, but it later formed the basis of the ‘studio frankfurt’ series, published in 1952 and 1953. The series included texts by Böll, Arno Schmidt, Weyrauch, Hildesheimer and Bachmann. Here Andersch was putting into practice the principles on which he had earlier elaborated in his 1947 pamphlet Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung, fusing the work of an older pre-war generation with one which genuinely began to publish after 1945, to create a new literary canon. This canon brought together those non-Nazi writers who had remained in Germany with some of those who had gone into exile, and looked to contemporary writing in France and Italy for inspiration. In 1952 Martin Walser, thirteen years younger than Andersch, was in his mid-twenties and had not yet emerged as a literary figure. He represented that younger generation which Andersch sought to adopt. Walser had been discovered by Helmut Jedele, who also worked part-time for Radio Stuttgart, later the Süddeutscher Rundfunk. The head of Radio Stuttgart, Dr Fritz Eberhard, had asked Jedele to scout for talented young recruits in Tübingen, and Walser fitted the bill. Walser, Hans Gottschalk and Helmut Jedele, all students at Tübingen, collaborated on Jedele’s