
WINDY TIMES. By Gunter Kunert Red
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Reviewed by TOM CLARK

Leaving this survey of literature from Berlin, I want to mention briefly another writer of that city/ one Cohen leaves out of his anthology and does not bother to mention in his introductory remarks on his omissions: Gunter Kunert. whose "Windy Times." a selection of verse and prose translated very ably by Agnes Stein, appears concurrently with "Berlin." Kunert's work makes the best of Cohen's contributors, as good as they are, sound like beginners.

This 52-year-old Berliner recently changed residence from East to West but in spirit remains, like his native city, "caught between two camps." In stripped-down, epigrammatic prose and verse he invokes an angst-prone, torn-sheeted Time Ghost of postwar Germany — one that looks back uneasily over its shoulder at bleak, new concrete streets, thoroughfares over which painful historical truths keep gaining on it. and sees a future where "facades remain." but "behind the curtains nothing."

Finding little hope in Utopian solutions, either democratic or socialist, Kunert concedes that "life progresses," but "where we are/no light shines any longer/and the dark comes from within us." Yet his dry-eyed fact-facing is as bracing as it is harsh, prescribing "self diagnosis of that incurable pain which sometimes leads to life. This is a major, world writer who drives hard truths home in simple, clear strokes, with an ironic directness and strength well worth the cost of the book.

TOM CLARK reviews frequently for The Sunday Camera Magazine. He is a former poetry editor of The Paris Review.