

OUTSIDERS

Gerlinde Ulm Sanford

*Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, Syracuse University, New York
USA*

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1. The Position of the Artist within Society

Over the centuries, the position of the artist within society has changed dramatically. In early Antiquity, poets as, e. g., Homer, were held in high regard. Being a poet was synonymous to being a prophet, a seer, a "vates." Painters and especially sculptors, on the other hand, were considered as being just artisans, as just craftsmen. Carpenters, shoemakers and so on, fell into the same category as sculptors; they all were merely "banausicos." Yet already in the 6th century BC, the famous Greek sculptor Phidias in Athens was able to befriend the Greek statesman Pericles; and the Greek sculptor Lysippos of Sikyon was permitted to be close to Alexander the Great. The Greek philosopher Plotin, finally, first acknowledged creativity as being the essential characteristic of any artist. Early Christianity once more scorned the artist; not so much because of considering him merely as craftsman, but rather because of seeing him as originator of idols. In addition, the reputation of artists leading a promiscuous and immoral life contributed to their continued low position in society or even their being treated as outcasts. Interestingly enough, the concept from late Antiquity of the artist being the "Deus artifex" slowly changed the views about the nature of art and also about the mission of art, yet remained nonetheless for a long time without practical consequence for the artist's pariah position within society. It was only the Cult of the Genius and the Romantic Movement in the 18th Century that finally brought about our modern high esteem of the artist's nature and mission, regardless of the category of art. Despite this new esteem, however, any artist, at least to some extent, is to be viewed as

outsider, even nowadays. Talent and genius are forever in disproportion to the demands and rules of everyday life within society. (see *Creators, Visionaries*)

Any person endowed with special talents and insights does not fit the norm and is, therefore, necessarily an outsider. This is true not only for the artist, but for any person who excels in one way or another. Of course, the degree of being an outsider, respectively of being considered an outsider varies with the degree of excelling and also with the trends of a certain time. Two examples: 1) According to Goethe, the artist, too, has to conform to the demands of practical life; whereas merely following artistic whims without consequent actions is being considered as inadequate and insufficient for a meaningful human life. 2) According to the Romanticists in Germany, on the other hand, the artist has the right to ignore bourgeois rules and morality. Demonic turmoil within him- or herself and also in contact with norm society constitutes the tragic but necessary fate of the Romantic artist.

Under dictatorships, artists whose views do not agree with the politics en vogue are often being pressured into even more extreme outsider positions than they occupy anyway because of their artistic nature.

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Biographical Sketch

Gerlinde Ulm Sanford received her PhD degree in Germanistics and Romanistics from the University of Vienna in Austria. After a few years as research assistant at the University of Marburg/Lahn in Germany, she went to Mississippi State University in the USA. Since 1968, she has been teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in German for the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics at Syracuse University in the USA. She has published a dictionary of Viennese professional names (*Wörterbuch alter Wiener Berufsnamen*), *Andreas Gryphius: Aemilius Paulus Papinianus* (text edition and commentary), *Konkordanz zu Schillers philosophischen und ästhetischen Schriften*, and numerous essays on modern Austrian writers, for instance Barbara Frischmuth, Michael Köhlmeier, Felix Mitterer, Robert Schindel, Werner Schwab, Peter Turrini, Josef Weinheber. Her areas of interest are linguistic studies, Goethe, and modern Austrian literature.