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Martin Zagatta: Informationspolitik und Öffentlichkeit. Zur Theorie der politischen Kommunikation in der DDR. Mit einer Fallstudie zur Einführung des Wehrunterrichts

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from the men in their lives. This is a theme that pervades much of Königsdorf's work. Many of her characters understand their need to do this, but few are able to achieve it.

Königsdorf's writing does not contain the grand historical, social or ideological view we have grown accustomed to expect in the work of writers such as Christa Wolf or Heiner Müller. Instead, Königsdorf's sharp eye observes important events on a small (but no less moving) scale. Her most effective stories are those that adopt a conversational style to examine the conflict-rife private world of her mostly female characters. Her sharp sense for human and institutional foibles, her ability to create widely varying narrative personas, and her impressive command of a concise (here one senses the scientist), readable literary language make her stories a pleasure to read.

James Knowlton
Rutgers University

Später Gast bei armer Witwe. By Martin Stephan. Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, no date given. 187 pp.

Initial examination of Stephan's tales leads one to assume that the figures who populate them are loners, exceptions to societal norms, undergoing yet another psychological or sociological evaluation generously tinted with political propaganda. The pleasant surprise comes whenever the central issues arise, for one senses that this writer is more in the business of portraying people who could transcend their monotonous lives. Some, in fact, are successful in doing so, and the beauty of it all is in large part due to the fact that these portraits come to life in the absence of a judgmental or moralizing tone.

Several "illustrations" by Albrecht von Bodecker accompany the stories without enhancing them at all. In fact, the economy with which Stephan shapes his narratives pretty well precludes any significant intrusion by these graphics into his tightly woven prose. The subject matter of the graphics is thus harmless, indeed, unintelligible.

Stephan experiments with role reversal rather skillfully. What, for instance, can a blind stranger see in the life of a young couple that eludes both partners? An oftentimes delicate balance appears here between despair and joy, loneliness and personal freedom, predictability and the unexpected. How does a poor widow celebrate life by freeing herself from certain comforts at home and material things? We are shown how human beings have an ethical task to perform in terms of designing a life that is rich in sensitivity and strong in self sufficiency.

Thomas I. Bacon
Texas Tech University

Informationspolitik und Öffentlichkeit. Zur Theorie der politischen Kommunikation in der DDR. Mit einer Fallstudie zur Einführung des Wehrunterrichts. By Martin Zagatta. Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984. Bibliothek Wissenschaft und Politik, Band 31. 143 pp.

In the realm of political rhetoric, things are seldom what they seem. This book is a study of theory and practice, which purports to show a "basic ambivalence of the socialist model of communication." What Martin Zagatta seeks to show is that the East German leadership is fundamentally dishonest when it comes to informing the public about important issues that concern them. Lenin himself asserted that a

state can only become strong when the masses know everything, and can act consciously on the basis of informed judgment. And this is indeed what East German theorists call for: the broad dissemination of information, a healthy, critical exchange of ideas, leading to rational and balanced decision-making by the Party. Few readers of Zagatta's book will be surprised that the reality of the GDR is different.

The major part of his study is given over to a discussion of models and theories of communication in the GDR. Journalism is seen by theorists as the link that binds together the public with the political leadership, giving the former a measure of participation in the governmental process. On the other hand the mass media are acknowledged to be a powerful means of manipulation: "the fastest-reacting and tactically most mobile, ideological and political weapons of the party." Sensitive, new information is first aired among the SED cadres, not in the newspapers, and these party functionaries then disseminate it as uneventfully as possible.

Zagatta's final and most interesting chapter represents a case study of how the introduction of pre-military instruction into the school curriculum broke all the rules on open government that theoretically exist in the GDR. The praesidium of the Council of Ministers apparently adopted the measure on 21 October 1976. There followed various confidential directives, culminating in a detailed edict of 1 February 1978, which declared Wehrunterricht obligatory for all 9th and 10th grade pupils. The public remained completely in the dark, however, until Evangelical church leaders caught word during May 1978 of what was afoot. The Education Ministry had clearly reckoned on opposition, having prepared a form letter to be sent to objecting parents, and opposition there was! Yet the concerns were heard only in the church press. The SED-controlled press contained almost no reference to any difference of

opinion on the subject between church and state. Zagatta concludes that the SED hinders its own effectiveness by not permitting an independent press, because it only receives a skewed picture of public opinion through its own official channels.

It is difficult to see the point of a book that condemns the GDR for not having a free press. No communist country has one nor is likely to, and no amount of exhortation from the West is going to change that. That is rather well known, and this dry, though mercifully brief, monograph was not necessary to reveal the fact. If it did anything to increase this reviewer's understanding of the GDR, it was in reinforcing the valuable role played by the church as the nagging conscience of society. The overall tone of the book is rather patronizing in a way which most scholars in the East and West will not find helpful or welcome.

Geoffrey J. Giles
University of Florida

Depesche an meine zukünftigen Eltern: Texte für den Frieden. Ed. by Erhard Schermer, assisted by Peter Rother. Berlin: Neues Leben, 1984. 210 pp.

Upon reading the editor's foreword written by Erhard Schermer, one is led to believe that this volume is an anthology of poetry which demonstrates how prominent poets throughout the ages have protested against the horrors of war and pleaded for the cause of peace. The young GDR poets whose work is featured in this book are merely continuing in this long tradition. Unfortunately this description is totally inadequate, for much of this volume amounts to nothing more than old-fashioned, unimaginative, simplistic Communist propaganda, the tone of which is reminiscent of the Cold War era of the