BOOK REVIEWS

Siebzehn schöne Fische. By Martin Stade. Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1976. 200 pages. DM 6,90.

Martin Stade's new collection of short stories offers the reader a fascinating variety of themes and structures which reflect the author's benevolently critical posture on contemporary GDR life. Stade provides no fixed answers. Rather, through his blend of lively prose and diverse situations, he suggests many questions which the alert reader is encouraged to ponder.
The subjects of these stories take us from urban to rural environments, consider younger and older generations, focus on concrete reality or fragile fantasy. In spirited imaginative language which reflects a mixture of resignation and explosive power, of peasant subtleties and practical experience, Stade attempts to present his view of the GDR today. Although the individual themes are different, one main thought reoccurs. Man in contemporary society should attempt to maintain a personal integrity and balance amidst changing social values. Sometimes the effort is successful. The alternative can lead to exclusion and isolation.
The idea of adjustment is reinforced in various ways. Titles like "Was ich träumte nach einer Beschimpfung," "Von einem, der alles doppelt sah," or "Der Betrukene" are suggestive of different perspectives. Words and phrases throughout the stories also reinforce the idea of new realities. The notion of change is more subtle as when Uskoreit, one of the many representatives of the older generation, departs "als liesse er für ewige Zeit die Kneipe hinter sich." A more dramatic example of change is the retired Studienrätin, who after losing her only companion ("Es war nur ein Hund"), becomes "die Trostlosigkeit in Person." Intriguing is the pronounced role assumed by the animal world. Animals serve as mirrors of pervasive social types, or they reflect technological influence. Prominent are the starlings ("Die scharf beobachten Stare") which are like "Stoßtrupps...vorzüglich organiziert." In the title story, however, the narrator's identification with the fishes as Brüder results from a total rejection of technological society where one fishes with Kriegsgeräte.
The final story, "Der Präsentkorb," reiterates many of the previous themes. It also suggests that there can be a positive reappraisal of the future, that technology can be put in proper perspective, and that generation conflicts are surmountable.
Stade's collection is highly recommended for the new or unacquainted reader.

J. David Sullivan
Blackburn College

****

Tragikomödien des Alltags. Gerichtsberichte. By Rudolf Hirsch. Berlin: Verlag das Neue Berlin, 1976. 302 pages. DM 5,-.

Like Haley's Roots, this very pleasant book is hard to classify as fact or fiction, but has an element of both. The author is apparently a court reporter and his book is a collection of slightly fictionalized but essentially factual reports on crime and punishment in the contemporary GDR.
Tragikomödien des Alltags is light reading, perfectly suited to a summer afternoon. Though it deals with crime and warns of the punishment for breaches of the criminal code, it does not do so in a menacing or didactic way. Rather, these are tales of das Menschliche and das Allzumenschliche, of human failings and foibles. They are cheerful little stories of embezzlement, of marital infidelity, of black-market activities, of bribery, of theft, but always presented with humor and lightness of touch. In a very real sense, the reader can feel the texture of daily life in the GDR through these short narratives. The jobs, titles, and salaries; the localities; the makes of the cars; even the names of the people bring the daily reality of GDR living vividly to the fore. Though Rudolf Hirsch is sarcastic at times to point out the errors of his tragi-comic heroes ways, the overall tone of his amusing, instructive narratives is positive and optimistic. It is a book to be enjoyed by all.

Richard L. Wood
University of Puerto Rico

****

Abriß der sorbischen Geschichte. By Jan Šofta. Bautzen: VLB Domowina Verlag, 1976. 270 pages. 5,80 Mark.

A detailed collection of reference works on the GDR should include some material on the Sorbs, a Slavic minority of about 100,000 people, or 0.6% of the population of the GDR today. The Sorbs (or, as they are also called in historical ethnography, the Wends) have managed to resist total assimilation throughout the sev-