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.

Thomas I. Bacon
Texas Tech University


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 communi-
cation 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 unevent-
fully 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 con-
tained 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 chan-
nels.

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

Deesper an meine zukünftigen Eltern: Texte für
den Frieden. Ed. by Erhard Schermer, assisted
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