

Angela Borgwardt. *Im Umgang mit der Macht: Herrschaft und Selbstbehauptung in einem autoritären politischen System.* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, GWV Fachverlage, 2002. 579 S. broschiert, ISBN 978-3-531-13833-6.



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From its inception, the literature of the German Democratic Republic has been viewed through the lens of its acceptance and legitimation of the power structure of that state. Analysis of GDR authors has often revolved around the question of whether a particular author can be seen as complicit in the formation of the power structure, or whether that author sought to work against it, in the form of reform-minded intellectuals attempting to change the system from within or outright critique of the socialist organization. Even today, this matter remains a central issue in GDR research. With the unification of Germany, the debate grew even larger, principally in the form of the so-called "Literaturstreit" of 1990, during which some of the GDR's most well-known authors, Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, as well as the Prenzlauer-Berg authors Rainer Schickelski and Sascha Anderson, were accused of being complicit in the operation of power in the GDR through their association with the MfS. These accusations were not entirely without merit, although a fundamental analysis of that association and whether opposition or dissidence can still be read in these authors' works would be necessary

before simply discrediting their role in GDR literary production. Angela Borgwardt's dissertation on the interaction between power and the public intellectual figure in the GDR presents one such interesting avenue for an exploration of the nature of power and its operation in a totalitarian regime that would make that sort of analysis possible.

The central issue in Borgwardt's study is the construction of a methodology to analyze positions of power and the possibilities for self-expression within an authoritarian political system. To accomplish this, Borgwardt uses an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on methods used with political science, history, and literary studies to define and categorize types of opposition and resistance and fits them into a more concrete schema of strategies of self-expression and modes of control. The book as a whole is divided into six sections and follows traditional dissertation format, beginning with a theoretical and historical framework and moving into an examination and analysis of some of the principal actors in GDR literary history--Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, and

Wolf Biermann. The book also features a very comprehensive bibliography for each of these authors, as well as for the field of research concerned with the study of social systems within totalitarianism. Indeed, the dissertation is very well documented and draws from a variety of sources, some of these naturally literary in origin, but also unpublished archival documents and official SED policies.

In the first section of the book, Borgwardt describes the nature of her project, its goals, and the theoretical framework she is seeking to develop to examine the workings of power in the GDR. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, she describes a state in which power is in a constant state of flux, that "zwischen Herrschenden und Beherrschten besteht eine Wechselwirkung, die sich in einem Prozess von Geben und Nehmen verschiedener Kapitalsorten vollzieht und nicht als statisches Verhaeltnis begriffen wird" (p. 42). Indeed, her theoretical discussion revolves primarily around the theories of Max Weber and his definition of power and control. Summarizing Weber, power "bezeichnet demnach die Moeglichkeit, eigene Interessen in jedem Fall behaupten zu koennen, weil man ueber wirksame Mittel verfuegt, die Widerstaende des Gegenuebers zu brechen zu ueberwinden," but it is control that becomes the most central issue, in the form of "institutionalisierte Machtausuebung" (pp. 35-36). Borgwardt is ultimately examining the authors and their ability to express themselves, however, as she begins to categorize their behavior in relation to *Herrschaft*. To do this, she develops a methodology of "interpretative Politologie," in which she employs literary and historical analysis to a problem articulated through political science. Because of this, her method naturally belongs more in the field of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research, but that does not detract in the least from her final "Schema politischer Systemdistanz," by which she is able to identify specific modes of resistance to state power versus behavior that aims more towards conformity and consensus (pp.

49-51). It is in this *Schema* where the direction of the book and its theory takes shape and elucidates much of the discussion of power operations that precede it. Fortunately for the reader, Borgwardt summarizes these functional categories of resistance and conformity even further in tabular form.

The next section provides a very short introduction to the history of GDR politics, cultural policy, and literary production. Though quite brief, as it encompasses only sixty pages, this summary is quite helpful in orienting a reader who is not familiar with the history of literary production in the GDR, as well as providing the necessary historical framework and in which her analysis of the individual authors is going to take place. Above all, it is a history of the control over literary production, especially following the eleventh plenum of the ZK in 1965, which marked the beginning of a new form of *Repressionspolitik* in GDR history. In the fifties and early sixties, as Borgwardt describes the political climate, public expression against the political system was dealt with quickly and punished. By 1969, however, cultural control was "perfected" by the MfS, thus delineating a change in repression from immediate punishment to a system of observation and evidence gathering (pp. 109-110). As public control of the authors appeared to go underground, the cultural climate appeared to become more liberal, only to turn back again to forms of open repression with the "Biermann-Ausbürgerung" in 1976. It is in this political climate that most of Borgwardt's analysis takes place, as she concludes the chapter with a discussion of the critical potential of the literature of the GDR, underlining once again her theoretical discussion of *politische Systemdistanz* in larger, historical terms. Here she draws on examples of dissident and oppositional authors such as Reiner Kunze, who fundamentally opposed the socialist social model presented by the GDR, and reform-minded socialists who were

critical, but still loyal to GDR, such as Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym, and Jurek Becker, to name a few.

The following sections of the book make up the heart of Borgwardt's analysis, as she examines Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, and Wolf Biermann. Naturally, the selection of these particular authors is meant to demonstrate Borgwardt's central thesis of political distance from the system, and the three subjects appear in order of increasing distance. Stefan Heym appears first, as a convinced socialist who at first never sought to criticize the Marxist-Leninist system of the GDR fundamentally. Rather he worked from within on a *systemimmanente* level, followed by increasingly intensified criticism of the system of suppression of artists, which he carried through by publishing many of his works in the West. Heym's political position, therefore, begins with consensus with the system, but moves as far as opposition by the late seventies. Heym is followed by Christa Wolf, also a convinced Marxist who sought ways to make the system better through constructive suggestions, but like Heym, becomes increasingly disillusioned. Borgwardt argues that as a result of this increasing disillusionment, Wolf's political position proceeds from its initial consensus in the fifties and sixties to one of opposition and, in time, dissent in the late seventies following Biermann's expulsion. Finally, Wolf Biermann, who constitutes the final subject in the analysis, follows an initially similar model as Heym and Wolf in his belief in socialism as a necessary phase on the way to communism. Unlike the others, however, due primarily to his more rebellious nature, which the SED had initially hoped to use for its own benefit (p. 438), Biermann's confrontation with state power was constant from the mid-sixties onward. On the scale of political distance, Biermann begins with a short period of difference to continued opposition by the early to mid-sixties.

In the final section of the book, Borgwardt summarizes the positions of the three authors and

attempts to classify them into types following her model of political behavior. In this way, Stefan Heym comes to represent an "*oeffentlichkeitszentrierten*" type, due to his particular strategy of publishing in the West in order to create "*Handlungsfreiraeumen*" and to undermine censorship measures as the expression of state power (p. 495). Christa Wolf, Borgwardt concludes, is of the "*literaturzentrierten*" type, because of her focus on literary creation as a method of public enlightenment and as the primary vehicle for her criticism of the state. Indeed, Borgwardt maintains, literature is Wolf's only avenue of political engagement; while "in der politisch-praktischen Handlungsphaere zeigt sie wenig Mut zum Risiko, eine Tendenz zur Konfliktvermeidung, Anpassungsbereitschaft, defensiv-reaktives Handeln, eine geringe Auflehnung gegen autoritaere Strukturen und Schwierigkeiten bei der Interessenartikulation," in literature Wolf appears much more prepared to endure conflict with the state apparatus (S. 495). Finally, Wolf Biermann appears as the "*kaempferisch-rebellischen*" type, because of his provocative nature and his "ungebrochene Handlungsfahigkeit, deutliche Interessenartikulation, Mut zum Risiko und grosse Konfliktbereitschaft" (p. 496). Concluding this section of the book, Borgwardt outlines the different offensive and defensive strategies for the confrontation with power and the different methods that the state employs to maintain control, as drawn from the analysis of the three authors.

All told, Angela Borgwardt's contribution to the field of GDR research represents an important step in drawing up a system to describe the relationship between the authority of the state and the room in which public intellectuals confronted that power. It would no doubt be very interesting to see her *Schema politischer Distanz* applied to other prominent GDR authors, in particular Heiner Müller, Franz Fuehmann, Helga Koenigsdorf, or Volker Braun, to name a few, or to other more openly aggressive writers, such as Rainer Kunze. Equally interesting would be the application of

this method of analysis to other socialist-totalitarian states in the past and present, as her theoretical framework would seem to be applicable to a variety of social configurations. Further, this book is not as adversarial for the reader as it might first appear due to its dissertation-style format. On the contrary, it is very well written and, aside from a few sections, quite readable. Borgwardt's analysis would appeal to scholars in a number of disciplines due to its interdisciplinary nature. Political scientists focusing on dissidence, self-expression and artistic expression under totalitarianism, historians concerned with the cultural policies of the GDR/SED, and Germanists engaged in literary and cultural studies would all find this book quite useful. Indeed, Borgwardt's book is ultimately a starting point for new methods of analysis that might prove useful to all of those academic disciplines and one that will no doubt be carried forward by further research in those fields.

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