

Stücke. By Rainer Kerndl. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1983. 248 pages. 6,- M.

Like Rudi Strahl, who, in the afterword to another selection of Kerndl's plays published in the same "dialog" series, complained of the "schnöde Behandlung" occasionally meted out to the dramatist by the GDR's theatres, Christoph Funke in his afterword to this volume counts Kerndl among those contemporary dramatists whose works are consigned to the files of history almost as soon as they have been written. Kerndl has called himself a "Journalist des Theaters" (since 1963 he has in fact been theatre critic of Neues Deutschland), and the four plays contained in this collection ("Doppeltes Spiel," "Nacht mit Kompromissen," "Jarash, ein Tag im September," "Der vierzehnte Sommer") reveal why. His characters lack true individuality and dramatic presence. They function basically as participants in a discussion of certain ethical/political problems. Each of them all too obviously represents a particular position within the spectrum of critical standpoints which the autor sets up, and none of them is ever at a loss for words to articulate that position. In sum, the characters do not so much interact as engage in debate with one another. One example will illustrate the point. The subject of debate in "Nacht mit Kompromissen" is the advisability (or otherwise) of compromise in the revolutionary struggle. In his desire to be true to himself and to the socialist ideas he embraced as a young man, Martin, a forty-year old radio journalist, decides to have done with compromise: "Ich geh jetzt geradeaus:

nach meinem Gewissen!" Gregor and others take a different view: "Willst wieder mal klüger sein als die Genossen? Willst der Partei Nachhilfeunterricht erteilen in Sachen Revolution? ...Wer heute Unsicherheit in den eignen Reihen schafft, besorgt die Geschäfte der Konterrevolution." Martin stands accused of "wirklichkeitsfremde Vorstellungen" and of "anarchistische Anfälle." The outcome? Martin is brought to a grudging realization that today's revolutionary barricade is the decidedly unromantic, down-to-earth "Planerfüllung." His questioning attitude is stamped as self-indulgent and irrational; the rebel is reintegrated; the moral is clear. In this play as in others, then, Kerndl shows himself to be "ein Moralist ..., ein Aufklärer, auch ein eifernder Pädagoge" (Funke) - in other words, a curiously anomalous figure in the increasingly sophisticated theatrical culture of the GDR. Unlike in the early years, when writers could justifiably regard themselves as part of the "Erziehungsarbeit im Osten" of which Anna Seghers spoke, GDR audiences today expect to be treated not as pupils in need of moral tuition but as partners in a dialogue. Despite the pleadings of Rudi Strahl and Christoph Funke, therefore, these plays would appear to have little prospect of ever finding a secure place in the GDR's theatrical repertoire.

Ian Wallace
University of Dundee