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Bradley, Laura. *Cooperation and Conflict. GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961-1989*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 312 pp. £49.50. ISBN 978-0-19-958963-0.

Laura Bradley's book about theatre censorship in East Germany is fascinating – not least because it is about something which officially did not exist: the GDR government took pride in claiming that in the first truly socialist state on German soil there was no need for censorship. The reality, of course, was very different and the system of checks and control, of spying and secret informers, of measures to prevent productions to go forward or playwrights from being performed, was elaborate and worked on various levels. However, as Bradley convincingly claims, it was not all about control but, importantly, we find a high level of cooperation as well. The idea that GDR theatre in general constituted a “socialist opposition” to official GDR politics (p. 278) is too simple, and in fact, Bradley's study strikingly shows that we are faced with complex patterns of relationships. At the same time her claim that “the need for theatre to be regulated was not widely questioned until 1987-9” (p. 3) seems questionable and is not backed up with hard facts. Despite socialist loyalties and a growing GDR identity the wish to act more independently of official SED (Socialist Unity Party) doctrine was perhaps stronger than Bradley seems to allow for.

Bradley's approach is sound, she looks at a number of metropolitan and regional theatres between 1961 and 1989, and discusses a variety of instances of censorship with a particular interest in how theatre practitioners and officials

negotiated crisis points (p. 8). She has interviewed a number of practitioners and consulted a wide range of sources.

Bradley's study is important not least because theatre in the GDR mattered, and it was subsidised at even higher levels than in West Germany. Theatre's political, social and cultural function was never questioned and explains why the SED was at pains to control theatrical production. On paper this system of control was straightforward but in practice it was anything but with personal contacts playing an important part (p. 274). Also, official attempts to disguise theatre censorship increasingly backfired from the late 1960s and forced the regime towards "damage limitation" (p. 280). This meant that productions featuring critical comments more or less hidden in revivals of classical drama were allowed to go ahead. Contemporary drama was a different matter, however, as many theatre directors avoided clashes and played safe with productions of established playwrights such as Brecht or Friedrich Wolf (p. 271).

However, Bradley convincingly argues – and this constitutes one of her major findings – that in contrast to wide-spread tendencies "to romanticize the relationship between GDR theatres and their audiences" (p. 274) the problems East German theatres faced were often quite mundane and sounded all too familiar to practitioners in the West. They complained about the audiences' taste for light entertainment and falling demand for serious drama, and particularly related to the need for "bums on seats".

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