

# Review memoirs about an anarchist

By Helene Ellenbogen & Wayne Parker

Once again the suppression of a free press in West Germany has become a cause celebre all over Europe. This time the target is a political autobiography written by a fugitive anarchist and one-time member of the urban guerrilla June 2nd Movement.

The book, *Wie Alles Anfang* (How I All Began) is written by Michael "Bommi" Baumann, a working class youth who describes his ascent into adulthood via rock-and-roll, the counterculture, dope, the sexual revolution, the anti-war movement, street actions and existence as an urban guerrilla. Bommi is in his late twenties and seems to be floating somewhere in Germany in disguise.

What makes the book so repugnant to the German authorities is the total lack of respect Bommi exhibits toward the authority of the State. Example: the city of Berlin is harried from one position to the other. Thousands of heavily armed police are checking every car

after a particularly heavy siege of political bombings and bank robberies. Bommi, dressed in his most colorful clothes (even more repugnant to the German than to the North American bourgeoisie) is driving a hippie van, also multi-colored, with an inscription on the back which says, "Caution, Dynamite Transporter!" Like every other car, he gets stopped. An earnest copper peers in, takes a disgusted look at him, sees the writing on the van and says, "Idiot! Get out of here." For once Bommi follows orders and drives on with his van filled with (you guessed it) dynamite and bombs.

This is just one example of an incredible number of capers in which more often than not the State is the loser. But everything is not fun and games in the book. Bommi criticizes the Red Army Faction (Baader-Mein-hoff) for their vandalism, and their attempt to beat the State at the one game in which the State will surely be superior—technology. He also criticizes his own group for their scheme how slowly caught up in the momentum of their endless

bombings and bank robberies, and most of all for the fact that they seemed to forget that the point of the revolution was freedom from all alienation.

The reaction of the State to the book when it appeared in 1975 was true to form. A massive raid involving 40 cops and prosecutors armed with submachine guns was staged at Trikont, a small left publisher in Munich. The cops (including members of the German secret police who bear the swastika name of Protectors of the Constitution) ransacked the Trikont office taking all of the files, orders, bills, names of customers and the remaining copies of Bommi's book along with the publisher's 1600-volume library. Then they took the print shop, took the plates for the books, plates for a woman's magazine, printing equipment including the composer, book prospectuses, typewriters and generally everything. This was not enough. All the apartments in the building were searched, ostensibly in the belief that the fugitive authors would be somewhere in the building. Needless to say, the search

warrant did not include this immense haul, nor the migrant worker family that was terrorized in one of the adjoining apartments.

Following the raid, similar actions took place in left bookstores throughout Germany. Public pressure to stop these outrages forced the police to begin a return search of the confiscated material within a week of the raid. Almost immediately leading left and liberal intellectuals from all over Europe, including Jean Paul Sartre and Heinrich Boll, along with left bookstores, publishers, and groups and individuals from every left tendency began campaigns to acquire Trikont publishers and to reprint the book. As a result, in early 1976, the book reappeared in 10,000 copies (the original printing had been 3,000) with the names of 380 co-publishers on the cover and front pages. This Tzipfel act of book-guerrilla effectively defeated a reconfiscation of the book.

The book was the first to be confiscated under Germany's new wave of fascist suppression laws (the latest passed this Summer under the popular label of muzzle laws). Since 1969, when the Social Democratic party came to power on the slogan, "We want to dare more democracy," Germany has moved toward a totalitarianism that is rivaled only by that of Spain and the Republic of Ireland in Western Europe. The main attack on the mass movement has been through the "Berufsverbot" a series of laws seriously restricting the freedom of thought and political action of anyone on the public payroll, about 20 per cent of the total workforce.

The two people responsible for the original publication of Bommi's book, Gisela Erler and Herbert Rottgen face a criminal trial which is widely viewed as a landmark test case of the new muzzle laws. These laws include provisions making it a criminal offense to write, publish, display, advertise, sell, etc., anything which either condones "violence against the State" or fails to condemn it. Needless to say, the book bearing potential of

glish. The English translators are presently soliciting publishers for the completed manuscript and hope to have it in print by the middle of this year somewhere in North America.

The campaign in support of Trikont and *Wie Alles Anfang* goes on. People inter-



German police move into action at demonstration.

such legislation is rather considerable.

Because of the attempt to suppress the book by the German authorities, its renown has spread throughout Europe. As a result, editions are now either in print or awaiting publication in French, Danish, Greek, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, and En-

glish. The English endorsement list or otherwise supporting Trikont should write to Trikont Verlag GMBH, Josephstrasse 16, 8 München 80, West Germany. Potential publishers for the English-language edition should contact Helene Ellenbogen; 5224 12th Ave. N.E., Seattle, Washington 98105.

## Katharina Blum's honor

By Mark Brothers

Directed by Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta; based on a novel by Heinrich Böll, With Angela Winkler and Mario Adorf. A New World Pictures release.

The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum, a 1975 German film, is an emotionally powerful account of a woman's response to the repression of "liberal democracy." Directed by Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta, this fast paced screen adaptation of a novel by Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll has recently been released in North American theaters.

At Katharina (Angela Winkler), an "apollonian" housekeeper, and Ludwig (Mario Adorf), a fugitive guerrilla, meet at a party, they spend the night together in her apartment. The next morning her breakfast is interrupted by an invading force of SWAT-styled commandos. Ludwig has already told Katharina he is hauled down to police headquarters where she's subjected to two days of a badgering interrogation, imprisonment and a bourgeois "honeymoon" visit. Ace reporter Totges of "The News," a sensationalist right wing newspaper (based on the German *Bild-Zeitung*), hacks out a series of features which denounce Katharina as a product of the "false ideas of socialism."

After the first session of questioning, Katharina's refusal to be prompted to a concerted cop to comment, "amazing how people find it hard to make a distinction between private and business life." But she is taken as a product of the "false ideas of socialism." When Katharina is finally

released she finds herself the target of constant crank calls, vandalism, and letters attacking her as a "commie" whose "love" for Ludwig builds into a radical aversion. "I know how those pigs work" she tells the prominent lawyer who employs her. By contrast the lawyer typifies a liberal's reaction to repression. When attacked by the press he vows to toss a bomb into the News' office the doesn't. He declares that he will punch in the jaw a conservative professor who had been Katharina's lover (he doesn't).

Katharina had provided Ludwig with the key to the professor's country villa. Her phone call to Ludwig tipped off the authorities and when she arrived at the "safe house" she found swarms of soldiers, tanks, and helicopters which had just encircled and captured him.

Pushed past the breaking point, Totges agrees to an interview with Totges. He begins by asking, "How about looking for a start?" Pistol shots ring out as her response.

At the police station when informed that Totges' photographs killed Katharina, he has been killed. Katharina is questioned, "Why not him too?" The photographer had represented the liberal half of "The News" team. He was a critical flunky, often unsettled by his companion's behaviour. Still, he had gone along. Although he was supposedly the objective observer of the film, repeatedly focused on his photos which had covered the front pages of "The News." They were the use-ups of Katharina's face, taken as she was being manhandled by police or crowds to depict her as the archetypical "deranged defiant

terrorist." After the photographer's death Katharina again appeared defiant as she tore the plates to embrace Ludwig, now her comrade as well as lover, as he passed by in a jailhouse hallway. But this time her outraged expression was for real; the photographer was dead.

The film ends at Totges' funeral where the reactions were out in force. So was a proliferation of photographers of course her lawyer boss showed up too). In the end the media creates its own life to report. In his obituary/press release, the owner of the News decried "The savagery of anarchy" and its effect on "our young democracy." His concern, he promised, "was far beyond personal considerations of whoever attacks the News attacks all of us."

Katharina Blum's experience occurs during a festival season at the entire society she is consumed by takes on the appearance of a gigantic costumed spectacle. A bizarrely costumed populace enmeshes with the assorted disguises of undercover cops until the audience can no longer distinguish between the assholes and the agents. Even the question of Katharina's "guilt" in bourgeois terms of guilt is sometimes obscured. Although her "innocence" is always established immediately, the blurred distinctions guilt/innocence, agents/assholes, personal/political, and the use of the ultimate vagueness, liberalism/fascism.

For Katharina the confusion has disappeared—"The cops are murderers of all of us." Tider takes us to rob people of their honor—sometimes their lives.

## Flight to Babylon North

By Anna Chroessa

Fight: The Last American Poem, by Charles Tidler. Pop Press, P.O. Box 48800, Bentall 83, Vancouver, B.C. \$2.50.

Charles Tidler won't let us forget the Vietnam War, nor our culpability in the mass slaughter of an innocent people, nor our now-embarrassing idealism in rottenness. Tidler takes us to the question of who ever attacks the News attacks all of us. Tidler has achieved his purpose with this powerful and explicit book, one which has strong anti-authoritarian overtones.

The central conflict in *Poem* is the struggle with the tender and sad, bitter and despairing feelings that overtake an individual in the process of rejecting his or her country. Tidler takes us with him on his fragmented and chaotic exodus from America in a series of poems designed to make us

see what he sees.

The journey begins at the point of decision—the burning of the draft papers—and progresses across the Midwest to the Pacific. The landscape is one of pollution and destruction. The sharp, evocative images give us a sense of how the vista is affecting the protagonist:

I would siphon a poetry hatch from the pool of my history but only choke on a mouthful of gasoline to measure the octane of our burnt-out veneration

An ambivalence floats through this section of the book, the ambivalence of someone who doesn't want to see what he sees. The cry is too loud, the condemnation too severe to be totally convincing. The protagonist is caught in a trap; he doesn't want to leave, but must.

Leave he does, and arrives in Vancouver. He spills the contents of his suitcase—his guts—out in the bus station; he camps on Wreck Beach; finally he takes "the train

across Canada. On the train he experiences Canada through the people he talks to, but, and more importantly, he struggles continually with his ambivalence. Tidler has successfully illustrated this struggle by personifying Honour, Decay and Treason:

Honour and Decay are brother and sister, hatch from one egg, spawn Treason. Each is ever the other's shadow.

The definition is significant because once naming the source of his ambivalence he can proceed to deal with it. Throughout the journey he finds these three shady, underworld figures, managing to avoid them, is torn, bet by them again and again, and finally, in Montreal, he has it out with them as they attack him on the platform. He fights them, managing to outpace in such a way that

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