
In his dissertation (doubtless copied from Deris de Kroengen's classic), Daniel Dentzer treated the similarities of communication in love and conflict, and, as an irrepressible womanizer, he has done much applied work on the former. But now he's learning its use in the latter as he continues to work for his Doktorarbeiten, Gerhard Weiss, who has become Hamburg's minister of culture and is bent on reforming its university.

At the center of the contest is the new professor, Schneider, who has been hired even though he is rumored to harbor rightist, indeed racist sentiments and even though there was a better-qualified female candidate, because of affirmative action for Gays. The rumors have not been substantiated, since his dissertation is not to be found, but a student group plans to stage a protest at his inaugural lecture nevertheless, led by one Hannah Krskaure, whose private favors Dentzer repays by ensuring this protest gets ample publicity. Her group is violently upstaged by a gang of apparent neo-Nazis, however, and she is beaten senseless in the process.

Weiss charges Dentzer with getting to the bottom of this and finding Schneider's dissertation. On visiting Hannah in the hospital, he is attracted to the journalist Vanessa Steinhäcker, who just happens to have some information about dealers in dissertations. They make arrangements with one of these for a dissertation that might be Schneider's, but instead they see the dealer turn up dead in Hamburg's harbor.

Next they visit a former Hamburg professor, Dr. Pfeiffer, who had opposed Schneider's hiring and has since taken a position in a new Petriwolan university on the site of the old Stasi school. Daniel and Vanessa learn that Pfeiffer actually possesses the dissertation in question, but he promptly has a fatal automobile accident and it's gone again.

Hannah meanwhile has succumbed to her injuries. At the funeral, Vanessa coaxes up to an admirer of Hannah's and has him show her the decred's apartment, for the persuasive reason that it might afford her a raise up—and some inside information about the Schneider affair.

And that is what she gets. Schneider seems to have plagiarized his dissertation whole cloth from that of University President Hartmut Schmidt. This would have been possible because the East did not let Western research in or let its own out.

And much else is possible as well. The plot is thick, but at bottom is the deterioration of German higher education. In Dietrich Schwanitz's book this has been brought about by the eponymous "circle"—perhaps as many as 20,000 West German students who, co-opted by the Stasi in those notorious 1960s, conspired to subvert their own university system.

A palatable plot? The savory stew Schwanitz has cooked up here, stirring together academic satire à la David Lodge with Le Carre-style coldwar intrigue, Shakespearean romantic comedy with Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, makes it succulently so. The intrigue of "the circle" is closed with the death of the real (!) villain, while the "romantic comedy" of the subtitle is consummated no less conspiratorially with the marriage of Daniel, *Der Zirkel*, unlike Schwanitz's mostly bitter 1995 novel *Der Commissar* (see word of the p. 551), is tart satire at its truly toothsome best.


Years ago, I gave a scientist friend a slim volume of poetry for his birthday. Not knowing how to read poetry, he was alarmed. My gift was Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Seit Tagen hzieh, Wunder* (1990); I told my friend not to worry, that this was readable poetry, and advised him just to start in. My inexperienced friend had success with that text, Treichel's second verse collection. After a third, and subsequently two volumes of prose, Treichel has now published a short but gripping work of fiction, establishing himself as an eminently readable author.

*Der Verlorene* (The Missing One) is an unusual story which takes place in the late 1980s, known as the era of the German "Economic Miracle"—unusual because it harks back to the end of the war and tells of that conflict's profound, long-lasting effect on families, even if far removed in time, place, and all other circumstances. The events from the past are told secondhand by a first-person narrator. A young woman near the Eastern front, baby in arms, flees to the West with thousands of other refugees at the end of the war. She is raped, then suffers the additional trauma of losing her child, because she turns him at strangers during the chaotic happenings. The apparent delayed reaction to this trauma more than a decade later seems to be because of the first-person narrator, a grade-school boy, born six or seven years after the missing firstborn son.