



**Gudrun Ensslin, hrsg. von Christiane und Gottfried Ensslin.** *„Zieht den Trennungsstrich, jede Minute“: Briefe an ihre Schwester Christiane und ihren Bruder Gottfried aus dem Gefängnis 1972-1973.* Hamburg: Konkret-Literatur-Verlag, 2005. 198 S. EUR 15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-89458-239-5.



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## Mythos Ensslin

The *Mythos RAF* exhibit that opened in January 2005 at the Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin set off another round of debate and discussion around the meaning and legacy of West Germany's past with political terrorism. Academic and public interest in this period of burgeoning postwar social and political activism, violent or otherwise, gained both momentum and scholarly legitimacy in the years leading up to the RAF (Red Army Faction) exhibit. To be sure, this increased attention will continue, as is evident in the wide range of publications, films, dissertations and memoirs already in the making. This collection of letters written from prison by RAF founding member Gudrun Ensslin is a welcome source that will help rectify the lack of primary documents available for historical research of the 1960s and 1970s.

After her arrest in Hamburg in June 1972, Gudrun Ensslin, a member of the first generation of the RAF, was detained at the Essen Penitentiary in North-Rhine Westphalia until April 1974. The letters in this volume were written between June 1972 and February 1973 by Ensslin to her sister Christiane and brother Gottfried. As de-

scribed in the introduction to the book, contact between detained RAF members was prohibited after their arrests, and Ensslin's communication with the world outside the prison was restricted to immediate family members (visits and written contact) and her lawyers. Furthermore, Ensslin's outgoing letters were censored and, in many instances, received by her siblings four to five years after her death. The corresponding letters written by Christiane and Gottfried to Gudrun were never recovered from Ensslin's cell. Their absence is noticed in reading the letters, although one can make conjectures as to their content via Ensslin's replies.

This collection is worth reading for several reasons. The letters provides a more balanced view of the woman branded a "terrorist" as well as a more in-depth reading of RAF ideology, which was grounded in Marxism and used to justify violence. In the introduction to the collection, the editors call attention to the fact that their sister consciously and carefully used her letters as a platform to campaign fervently for her beliefs. In these letters, Ensslin developed, expanded and repositioned her theoretical viewpoints and applied her ideological dogma-

tism to everyday life in prison. Her passionate diatribes on prison conditions, the institutions of the West German state and global political developments in the early 1970s are interspersed with itemized, detailed descriptions of books, clothing and personal accessories that she needed in prison.

While the readers of this collection will undoubtedly gain greater insight into the political and social context in which these letters were written—particularly the para-

noia, public hysteria and infringement of civil rights that took place in the name of security—the book is not recommended for those unfamiliar with this period of history in the Federal Republic. Although the footnotes are generous and provide an excellent supplement, scholars should also use the book with care. Konkret Literatur Verlag is not an academic publisher and the target German-speaking audience is most likely a combination of academics, younger leftists and contemporaries of Ensslin.

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