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Helga Königsdorf: Der Lauf der Dinge. Geschichten

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Third Reich have not played greater roles in the economic and cultural reconstruction of the Federal Republic. She also tells us twice that the television series "Holocaust" was necessary to inform West Germans about the persecution of Jews whereas East German school children already know a great deal about the history of National Socialism.

This book is recommended as an authorized East German view of conditions in the GDR today. It is a good cheap survey of how leaders and social scientists explain the GDR to westerners.

John A. Maxwell
West Virginia University

Der Lauf der Dinge: Geschichten. By Helga Königsdorf. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982. 217 pp.

"Ich habe Verhaltensmuster akzeptiert, die mir aufgeschwatzt worden sind, ich habe Talent bewiesen, alles zu tun, was man von mir erwartet, nur eins habe ich darüber vergessen, ich weiß nicht mehr, wer ich bin," (Schreib-Auskunft: Helga Königsdorf, Neue Deutsche Literatur, 27, nr.4 (1979), 9-10) wrote Helga Königsdorf about the reason she began writing fiction. Der Lauf der Dinge, Königsdorf's second collection of short stories, is the result of this pressing need to discover a private identity.

The book testifies eloquently to her ability as a prose writer effectively to express a side of both her private and her public lives she had been forced to neglect in college and in her profession. Since 1962, Königsdorf, a physicist by training, has been working in mathematics research, and this rigorous occupation has left her little time to examine herself and her relationship to both her work and her society.

The fourteen stories published in this

known volume reflect the two realms of experience their author lives in: About half the collection is devoted to stories about women attempting to establish their own identity in a world which is divided into a male-dominated work realm and a private sphere in which men represent an oppressive weight that threatens to suffocate the female characters. The remaining pieces are at times hilarious and always effective satires of the practice of science in the GDR.

Many of Königsdorf's stories describe a dreamlike world from which the characters awake to discover a new dimension of everyday reality that begins to subvert all they have held dear and unquestionably accepted. "Ehrenwort -- ich will nie wieder dichten," the first piece in the book, concerns a woman who wakes up one day to discover that overnight she has become a poet. Her husband and son are shocked and irritated about this transformation (the husband screams at her: "Ja Dichter ... aber Du! Du bist meine Frau"(p.13)) and her colleagues at work, research scientists, feel betrayed by the personality change. As a result of this pressure she awakes one day and finds that she is no longer a poet and returns to the practiced routine of her previous life.

"Die Wahrheit über Schorch" is the story of a woman whose devastating experiences with men (she is recently divorced) lead her to invent a new husband, Schorch, who represents in reality her recourse to masturbation as the only method of physical fulfillment she is able to discover -- this despite warnings she reads in magazines about possible "Hautausfall, Konzentrationschwäche, Rückenmarkzersetzung, (und) allgemeine Auflösung der Persönlichkeit"(p.44).

In "Unverhoffter Besuch", perhaps the best story in the volume, a teenage daughter, living with her father following her parents' divorce, visits her mother's apartment, where the two discuss ways of living that will allow them to define their identity as individuals independent

from the men in their lives. This is a theme that pervades much of Königsdorf's work. Many of her characters understand their need to do this, but few are able to achieve it.

Königsdorf's writing does not contain the grand historical, social or ideological view we have grown accustomed to expect in the work of writers such as Christa Wolf or Heiner Müller. Instead, Königsdorf's sharp eye observes important events on a small (but no less moving) scale. Her most effective stories are those that adopt a conversational style to examine the conflict-rife private world of her mostly female characters. Her sharp sense for human and institutional foibles, her ability to create widely varying narrative personas, and her impressive command of a concise (here one senses the scientist), readable literary language make her stories a pleasure to read.

James Knowlton
Rutgers University

Später Gast bei armer Witwe. By Martin Stephan. Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, no date given. 187 pp.

Initial examination of Stephan's tales leads one to assume that the figures who populate them are loners, exceptions to societal norms, undergoing yet another psychological or sociological evaluation generously tinted with political propaganda. The pleasant surprise comes whenever the central issues arise, for one senses that this writer is more in the business of portraying people who could transcend their monotonous lives. Some, in fact, are successful in doing so, and the beauty of it all is in large part due to the fact that these portraits come to life in the absence of a judgmental or moralizing tone.

Several "illustrations" by Albrecht von Bodecker accompany the stories without enhancing them at all. In fact, the economy with which Stephan shapes his narratives pretty well precludes any significant intrusion by these graphics into his tightly woven prose. The subject matter of the graphics is thus harmless, indeed, unintelligible.

Stephan experiments with role reversal rather skillfully. What, for instance, can a blind stranger see in the life of a young couple that eludes both partners? An oftentimes delicate balance appears here between despair and joy, loneliness and personal freedom, predictability and the unexpected. How does a poor widow celebrate life by freeing herself from certain comforts at home and material things? We are shown how human beings have an ethical task to perform in terms of designing a life that is rich in sensitivity and strong in self sufficiency.

Thomas I. Bacon
Texas Tech University

Informationspolitik und Öffentlichkeit. Zur Theorie der politischen Kommunikation in der DDR. Mit einer Fallstudie zur Einführung des Wehrunterrichts. By Martin Zagatta. Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984. Bibliothek Wissenschaft und Politik, Band 31. 143 pp.

In the realm of political rhetoric, things are seldom what they seem. This book is a study of theory and practice, which purports to show a "basic ambivalence of the socialist model of communication." What Martin Zagatta seeks to show is that the East German leadership is fundamentally dishonest when it comes to informing the public about important issues that concern them. Lenin himself asserted that a