

1986

Martin Stephan: Später Gast bei armer Witwe

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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.

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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.

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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