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Eva Strittmatter: Mai in Piestany

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wenn ihr das Wissen nicht mehr aus dem Sinn gehen will, daß uns, egal wie hoch und wie weit wir unsere Sonden in den Weltraum schicken, "kein menschliches Signal... antworten wird"?

Alexander Stephan
University of Florida

Frauendienst. Erzählungen und Aufsätze. By Günther de Bruyn. Halle-Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1986.

This volume collects stories, autobiographical material, and essays on literature written between 1960 and 1985, some of which have been revised for this edition. Six of the stories, which were published at different times and places, are here united under the apt title "Traumstationen." The stories illustrate de Bruyn's frequently stated artistic credo that "Eigenstes, genau dargestellt, sich als Allgemeines erweist."

The essays are more than just literary-historical introductions. They are personal and imaginative recreations of the past, centered for the most part on what de Bruyn terms the "Friedensjahrzehnt" 1795-1806, the great era of literary production during which the major political events were occurring not in Prussia but elsewhere. De Bruyn is interested in the variety of reactions to these events, which he does not force into a left/right spectrum but rather sees as a broad and diverse palette. Here de Bruyn reveals his eye for the scandalous and the piquant. He has a wonderfully detached attitude towards the great names as he tastefully describes, for example, Fichte and A.W. Schlegel running into each other in the bedroom of Tieck's sister, who at the time was still married to another man. He is also master of the telling description: Nicolai "mit seinen vernunftsmoraldurchtränkten Verdammungen," Friedrich Wilhelm II: "der dicke Monarch mit den

Samples: Eva Strittmatter: Mai in Piestany vielen Frauen," Jean Paul "der antiklassische Erzähler in klassischer Zeit."

De Bruyn's love of Berlin and its surroundings, Fontane's landscape, is much in evidence in these essays. He is a reliable tour guide who stresses unobtrusively the continuity of the past into the GDR present.

Hamilton Beck
Wabash College

Mai in Piestany. By Eva Strittmatter. Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1986. 213 pages.

Mai in Piestany is Eva Strittmatter's touching account of her personal development during the ten Mays (1975 - 1984) which she and her husband, Erwin, spent at this resort. Although she presents amusing and anecdotal vignettes of the various hotel guests, they, as well as the staff, the sights, and events at Piestany mainly function as catalysts for Eva Strittmatter's thoughts and recollections. In Mai there is no rigid observation of chronological time; rather, Eva Strittmatter deftly interweaves the past with the present to create a montage of Lebenslinien which comprise her developing self during this period.

Eva Strittmatter's development is measured by her ability (or inability) to cope with change whose irrefutability and inevitability she conveys in such ordinary and unimportant phenomena as the hotel furniture, the names of streets and schools, and the season of spring. For Eva Strittmatter, the past represents a more stable and secure period: "Irgendwann habe ich in einer reinen unberührten Welt gelebt" (p. 97), and consequently she frequently escapes the present by fleeing into the past or into the 'timeless' countryside. Eva Strittmatter's doubt and uncertainty prompt her to ponder the meaning of her life which she finds, to a large extent, in her writing. For Eva Strittmatter,

writing is not only a vocation, but also an effective means for true communication. Moreover, in light of her increasing awareness of her own mortality, writing also becomes her legacy to her people. While Eva Strittmatter's writing has caused her to become a celebrity, she staunchly and repeatedly reaffirms her identification with the "Milieu der kleinen Leute." Thus Eva Strittmatter experiences little conflict between her private self (mother and wife) and her public self (writer).

The second part signals a different stage in her personal growth which is more dominated by her private self, and we now learn more about her family life. Change continues to be a major issue; however, whereas in the first part it is largely distant and abstract, in the second part it is highly personalized: she is confronted with the deaths of friends and family members. Undeniably, the most significant change is Erwin's deteriorating health, but amid all this radical change Eva Strittmatter achieves an inner peace.

In Mai in Piestany we experience with Eva Strittmatter her ongoing struggle with change and her gradual acceptance of it. Although death and illness dominate the second part, this autobiographical work ends with a cautious optimism: she finally realizes that despite change there can be continuity which enables her to face the uncertainty of the future. An eloquent and warm language, a heightened sensitivity, and, above all, frank honesty lend unusual charm, interest, and readability to Mai in Piestany,

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Passage. By Christoph Hein. Printed in: Theater der Zeit 5 (1987), 50-64.

the Weißensee area of Berlin is an extraordinary and eerie landmark of German history: the Jewish cemetery. Except for a small area near the administration buildings with recent graves, the cemetery has remained silent and neglected since the late 1930s. The domes of mausoleums have caved in, tombs and smaller graves are tangled and overgrown with trees, vines and shrubs, many are partially overturned and in a state of ruin, some as evidence of Nazi vandalism. In one or two mausoleums great stones lie askew, revealing the two-foot crawl space where Jewish families sometimes hid from terror. Many of the plots are totally inaccessible and obscured by the primeval forest which is springing up everywhere, histories forgotten and vanished with the disappearance of all descendants. The startling beauty and peace of the cemetery creates a stunning atmosphere much more befitting the memories it contains than were it well-manicured. One large corner of the cemetery is still fairly tidy. There lie in rows with small white gravestones, all alike, Berlin's share of the some 12,000 Jewish soldiers who fell during World War I. At the head of the plot stands a modest monument erected at that time to their honor and commending them for their bravery, their service and their sacrifice for the German fatherland.

Hein's newest chamber play is set in the back room of a cafe on the French-Spanish border at the foot of the Pyrenees shortly after the French capitulation to the Hitler regime. Among the small group of Jews hidden in the cafe by members of the French underground resistance and waiting to escape over the Pyrenees and gain passage on a ship is the 76-year old Albert Hirschburg, a retired German officer who fought in World War I. Hirschburg's behavior as a proud military veteran, who believes that his patriotic military background takes precedence over all other considerations, including race, brands him as the outcast of the group. He has not acknowledged any persecution of the Jews.

Not far from where Christoph Hein lives in