Martin Stade: Siebzehn schöne Fische

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Stade's collection is highly recommended for the new or unacquainted reader.

Martin Stade's new collection of short stories offers the reader a fascinating variety of themes and structures which reflect the author's benevolently critical posture on contemporary GDR life. Stade provides no fixed answers. Rather, through his blend of lively prose and diverse situations, he suggests many questions which the alert reader is encouraged to ponder.

The subjects of these stories take us from urban to rural environments, consider younger and older generations, focus on concrete reality or fragile fantasy. In spirited imaginative language which reflects a mixture of resignation and explosive power, of peasant subtleties and practical experience, Stade attempts to present his view of the GDR today, although the individual themes are different, one main thought reoccurs. Man in contemporary society should attempt to maintain a personal integrity and balance amidst changing social values. Sometimes the effort is successful. The alternative can lead to exclusion and isolation.

The idea of adjustment is reinforced in various ways. Titles like "Las ich träumte nach einer Beschimpfung," "Von einem, der alles doppelt sah," or "Der Betrukene" are suggestive of different perspectives. Words and phrases throughout the stories also reinforce the idea of new realities. The notion of change is more subtle as when Uskorei't, one of the many representatives of the older generation, departs "als lasse er für ewige Zeit die kneipe hinter sich." A more dramatic example of change is the retired stüdienerölt, who after losing her only companion "(es war nur ein Hund)", becomes "die Trostlosigkeit in Person." Intriguing is the pronounced role assumed by the animal world. Animals serve as mirrors of pervasive social types, or they reflect technological influence. Prominent are the starlings ("Ich scharf beobachten Stare") which are like "Stosstruppen...vorzüglich organisiert." In the title story, however, the narrator's identification with the fishes as Brüder results from a total rejection of technological society where one fishes with Kriegergerät.

The final story, "Der iräsentkorb," reiterates many of the previous themes. It also suggests that there can be a positive reappraisal of the future, that technology can be put in proper perspective, and that generation conflicts are surmountable.

Sullivan: Martin Stade: Siebzehn schöne Fische

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