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Günter de Bruyn: Frauendienst. Erzählungen und Aufsätze

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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 Günter 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

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.

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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,