

Strittmatter, Eva. *Der Schöne (Obsession). Gedichte.* Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1996. 84 p.

Eva Strittmatter's *Der Schöne* is a thin tome of poems that celebrate and bemoan love. The volume is divided into two parts, each of which follows a loose chronological order from May to September.

With the first poem, Strittmatter weaves a rich texture of traditional love images to depict her newly-found love. The nightingale appears against the background of May, a time of renewal. In another poem she captures her wonder and joy with three powerful words, "ich liebe wieder" (11). In the early stages of this relationship Strittmatter wavers between lucid moments and obsession. While all too aware of the vicissitudes of love, she is powerless to resist. Indeed, love becomes synonymous with life and vice-versa: "Doch daß ICH Sie liebe, beweist, daß ich LEBE" (15).

Strittmater depicts a traditional love relationship in which the woman is dependent: she is the supplicant and vulnerable lover. Unfortunately, her love does not appear to be reciprocated. Not until much later does Strittmatter reveal that her lover was probably unaware of her passionate feelings. Her self-doubt is further fueled by her age. She thus appears content to live for the moment, ignoring the past and future: "Nichts ist mir die Vergangenheit, / Und Zukunft wird nicht sein" (14).

The last poem in the first part contrasts sharply with the first, signaling the loss of this love. The hopeful and expectant mood of May, "Daß die Liebe wieder möglich ist" (12), is replaced by the sorrow and despair of June, "... in meinen Adern summt / Mehr keine Liebesgeflüster" (34). Now the nightingale is "für immer vestummt" (34).

This last poem in the volume's first section should be read together with the first poem in the second section, for they vividly portray Strittmatter's despair and anguish: "Daß ich blind ohne Hoffnung bin" (37). Moreover, this failed love increases her own feelings of loneliness: "Es lieben mich alle. Doch keiner liebt MICH" (38). Here, too, she introduces the recurring figure of "spectators" who see but are blind to her inner turmoil: "...Die mich sehen, / Lassen sich täuschen, und sie meinen: / Du bist so heiter letzter Zeit... / Wenn Haltung heißt: nach innen weinen,/Dann lebe ich in HEITERKEIT" (43) Passages such as this accentuate Strittmatter's isolation.

The second part of the volume finally provides more information about Strittmatter's current family circumstances. She speaks tenderly of her long life with her late husband, Erwin, whose death helps to explain her current crisis. She also devotes more attention to describing the origin of this love relationship during a three-day period in May. Though candid about her feelings, she is nevertheless vague about the facts, refraining from ever describing or identifying her lover. He remains "Herr B."

Further, her use of the formal you (Sie) when addressing him may also indicate a distance or barrier existing between them.

Unable or unwilling to communicate her true ardent feelings to this lover, Strittmatter turns to poetry in an attempt to come to terms with this love and hence to survive it. In an earlier poem she recognizes the power of the word and wistfully wishes that she could indeed rewrite or remold her lover: "Aus dem Sie sind, in den, den ich will" (22).

In my review of Strittmatter's *Mai in Piestany* (GDR Bulletin, Vol. 13, 1987), I examined Strittmatter's difficulties in coping with change. In *Der Schöne* change resurfaces as falling in love. Although new love enables her to feel alive again, it also causes her much pain. These poems chronicle her painful personal development. Through poetry Strittmatter finally finds an inner strength to continue and to live. In the end, she survives love and exhibits a determined resignation: "Die Liebe habe ich verschwiegen, / Nun muß ich auch alleine trauern. / Geschlagen muß ich unterliegen. / Aber ich will auch kein Bedauern, / Kein Trostwort. Daß ich dieses Jahr / So hell, so hoch erheben war" (84).

Written in verse and mostly untitled, this collection offers a highly intimate account of failed romance. While her poems at times verge on the maudlin, they nonetheless demonstrate Strittmatter's mastery of the language. This alone makes *Der Schöne* worth reading.

Susann Samples
Mount Saint Mary's College