

Berlin Stories – Books of a City

A documentary by Simone Dobmeier and Torsten Striegnitz

In coproduction with RBB, in cooperation with ARTE

52 min

„Berlin Stories – Books of a City“ is a character study of the capital based on the stories that were and are written there. Witnesses are Franz Biberkopf, protagonist of the great Berlin novel “Berlin Alexanderplatz”, Herr Lehmann from Sven Regener’s West Berlin story of the same name and Paul and Paula, the East Berlin couple from Ulrich Plenzdorf’s “Legende vom Glück ohne Ende”.

What vision of Berlin do these characters convey? Does an image of the city consolidate? Or does Berlin’s literature consist of nothing but chronicles of stages and sensitivities of a city that is “condemned forever to becoming and never being”?

Is there one big contemporary novel that manages to handle today’s Berlin with all its complexity? And can a city that keeps reinventing itself perpetually leave a literary fingerprint by which it can be grasped at all?

The Party Berlin of the Easy-Jet Generation is told by means of Oscar Coop-Phane’s recently published “Bonjour Berlin”. Further insights into the present provide Ulrich Peltzer’s novel “Teil der Lösung”, that deals with gentrification and surveillance, and Nellja Veremej’s “Berlin liegt im Osten”. From a present-day point of view, the German Russian writer draws a fascinating line to Döblin’s 1920’s depicting especially the topic of migration and city.

The books and their protagonists are at the heart of the narration. They provide the guideline to get down to the literary core of the city by linking literary action to current issues of the city. Motives like space and liberty, politics, culture and sociology, that can be found in the novels in various ways, have mutually influenced city and literature likewise.

Berlin writers such as Ulrich Peltzer, Nellja Veremej and Annett Gröschner, and the head of the features section of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Claudius Seidl reflect their personal view on literature and city in interviews. The French publicist Alban Lefranc, literary scholar Susanne Ledanff and historian Alexandra Richie collate these perspectives with the view

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from the near and far abroad.

The thrilling involvement with literature and urban space goes along with a unique aesthetic that transfers the books, their texts and their main characters into the modern day. The camera keeps linking the urban space with the scenes that take place in it and consistently calls the action to a halt – thus putting the focus on those moments, that ultimately give rise to literature: the stories of a city.