

BERLIN BLUES BY SVEN REGENER



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From Publishers Weekly

More like a lovely dirge than the blues, this novel, set in 1989, just as Berlin's East-West divide is fading, features Frank Lehmann, nearly 30, examining his slowly dissipating track. He lives in a studio apartment on the West side, works at a bohemian Kreuzberg district bar, has moderate drinking habits and various romances: he judges himself content. However, a tension between Frank's self-assessment and what we see of his actual encounters drives this gentle book forward. Episodic chapters like "The Dog," "Mother," and "A Late Snack" cover precisely what their titles name, in a manner that mirrors Frank's what-you-see-is-what-you-get nature. His inchoate affair with a beautiful chef named Katrin never quite turns into a full-blown relationship. The closest thing he has to a best friend, a sculptor named Karl, is deeply unstable. A trip to the East with an envelope of family money goes lightly awry. By the time the Wall actually falls, "Herr Lehmann" (as friends jokingly call him with mock formality) has made no decisions of any sort, despite very involved internal negotiations. In most books, Frank's Warholian flatness would come off as pretentious or thin; here it is sweet, if a little cold, and the incidentals of old West Berlin make for a nice backdrop. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist

The lead singer of a German rock band tries his hand at fiction with hilarious results. Herr Lehmann, as his friends have taken to calling him in deference to his approaching thirtieth birthday, has been tending bar for nine years in a hip if seedy section of Berlin. Proving that slackers are the same the world over, Lehmann uses what little energy he possesses to duck his parents, recover from his frequent hangovers, and, in general, avoid serious commitments of any kind. But over the course of a few crucial months in 1989, he falls in and out of love with a beautiful chef; engages in absurdly comic encounters with a menacing dog, bureaucratic customs officials, and a rule-bound bus driver; and comes to the aid of his best friend, who suffers a nervous breakdown. And, in the anticlimactic finale, he witnesses the fall of the Berlin Wall. Deadpan dialogue, an overwhelming sense of ennui, and spot-on descriptions of countless dreary bars give this first novel its remarkably rich atmosphere. The German counterpart to Jay McInerney's classic depiction of the 1980s, *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). Joanne Wilkinson Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Review

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It's 1989 and, whenever he isn't hanging out in the local bars, Herr Lehmann lives entirely free of responsibility in the bohemian Berlin district of Kreuzberg. Through years of judicious sidestepping and heroic indolence, this barman has successfully avoided the demands of parents, landlords, neighbours and women. But suddenly one unforeseen incident after another seems to threaten his idyllic and rather peaceable existence. He has an encounter with a decidedly unfriendly dog, his parents threaten to descend on Berlin from the provinces, and he meets a dangerously attractive woman who throws his emotional life into confusion.

Berlin Blues is a richly entertaining evocation of life in the city and a classic of modern-day decadence.

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—Booklist

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

This story was alright. I don't connect to male ...

By Sierra

This story was alright. I don't connect to male characters very much, and I didn't really get into this as much as *Woman in Berlin*.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Great novel

By J. Martin Herbert

I don't want to say much here, other than to challenge T. Ross's review, which might scare readers away and thus deny them from experiencing this author's clear voice and sarcastic view of the world. You don't need to know Berlin to understand this novel; you need to know (or be able to imagine) what it feels like to be a simple, regular person who feels uncomfortable with a society that doesn't share your values or seems to be chasing after some sort of higher happiness that maybe just doesn't exist. The title character has bite, and falls into the great tradition of slacker heroes dating back to Erich Kästner's "*Fabian*" (1931) and Goncharov's "*Oblomov*" (1859).

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Great Book (Herr Lehmann)

By theWopr

One of my favorite books. You might get more out of it if you understand a bit about German culture.

Calling someone "Mr." and using the informal version of you is a contradiction in German. Combination of formal and informal. When Frank's friends start calling him Mr. Lehmann when he turns 30, it is a bit joke.

I highly recommend watching the movie (Herr Lehmann). One of those few examples where the movie really represents the book well. Plus, it has a great soundtrack! Herr Lehmann [NON-USA FORMAT, PAL, Reg.2 Import - Germany]

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