

Not all that glitters is gold

Daniel Guebel's latest novel deals with the crisis of a middle-age marriage

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Ella, by Daniel Guebel. Sudamericana, 2010. 190pp.

Matias and his wife, Josefina, have three children. They live in a gated community outside Buenos Aires City. They both attended bilingual schools and met through mutual friends. Matias works all day long while Josefina stays in the house, goes to the gym and takes care of the kids. But Josefina isn't as happy living a secluded life as she hoped she would be. She feels something is missing.

One day, Josefina finds out that she is pregnant once again. The possibility of having a baby and committing fully to raising another human being fills her life with joy. Soon, however, health complications arise and the pregnant mother learns that her baby's life is in danger.

Josefina becomes obsessed: she wants to have the child at all cost. Little does it matter that she already has other kids —she wants this baby more than anything else. The

doctor tells Josefina that she must rest and try not to move too much. Josefina takes the advice to heart and stays tied to her bed for weeks.

At another appointment with the doctor, he tells her that the situation is worse than before and that now she must move around a bit. Back home, Josefina decides to take a walk around the neighbourhood. She gets to a deserted area and spots a guard staring at her. She feels in danger —what if this man wanted to do something to her? But the man stares at her for a reason: Josefina is bleeding.

Josefina loses the baby, sinks into depression and is unable to rise from bed. In the meantime, the fenced community neighbours start having security concerns —what if someone gets in? After all, the community is surrounded by shanties.

That's how Matias decides to install surveillance cameras inside his house, to be able to monitor Josefina from his office all day and make sure nothing happens to his family.

At last, he has the chance to see Josefina as he has never seen her before. His wife is sinking deeper into severe depression, but Matias can't

understand. He feels unable to reach into his wife's mysterious heart.

This is when Julián comes into the picture. Julián and Matias have been friends from their teens, but they are exactly the opposite. Julián is single, likes to travel and take risks. He is very critical of Matias' life and can't understand how someone can settle down into a life as tedious as his friend Matias'.

Julián travels to Japan and has a life changing experience. He tells Matias all about it. Matias starts to get increasingly tempted by this adventurous lifestyle.

Will Josefina and Matias' marriage survive this crisis?

Daniel Guebel, the author of *Ella*, was born in Buenos Aires in 1956, and is regarded as one of the best novelists of the new Argentine generation. He has published *La perla del emperador*, *Los elementales*, *El perseguido* and *Derrumbe*, among other books. Guebel also wrote movie scripts - *Sudeste*, *Tesoro mio* and *La vida por Perón*.

As usual with Guebel, much of the charm of this novel arises from his supple, catchy prose. His sarcastic register, however, criticizing



Novelist-screenwriter Daniel Guebel.

the mores of fenced community elites lacks in originality. Instead of focusing on the characters' inner feelings, he writes from a distant standpoint, and in a condescending manner. Furthermore, this is not Guebel's first novel revolving around the breakup of a marriage and the denigration of a man suddenly torn from house, wife and children. Fenced off — or in — the people in *Ella* lead far from peaceful lives. The sheltering bubble won't protect them from jealousy, deception and unfaithfulness.

