Great Read

Steve Martins first foray into fiction is as assured as it is surprising. Set in Los Angeles, its fascination with the surreal body fascism of the upper classes feels like the comedians familiar territory, but the shopgirl of the books title may surprise his fans. Mirabelle works in the glove department of Neimans, selling things that nobody buys any more. Spending her days waiting for customers to appear, Mirabelle looks like a puppy standing on its hind legs, and the two brown dots of her eyes, set in the china plate of her face, make her seem very cute and noticeable. Lonely and vulnerable, she passes her evenings taking prescription drugs and drawing dead things, while pursuing an on-off relationship with the hopeless Jeremy, who possesses a slouch so extreme that he appears to have left his skeleton at home. Then Mr. Ray Porter steps into Mirabelles life. He is much older, rich, successful, divorced, and selfish, desiring her without obligation. Complicating the picture is Mirabelles voracious rival, her fellow Neimans employee Lisa, who uses sex for attracting and discarding men. The mutual incomprehension, psychological damage, and sheer vacuity practiced by all four of Martins characters sees Shopgirl veer rather uncomfortably between a comedy of manners and a much darker work. There are some startling passages of description and interior monologue, but the characters are often rather hazy types. Martin tries too hard in his attempt to write a psychologically intense novel about West Coast anomie, but Shopgirl is still an enjoyable, if rather light, read.

--Jerry Brotton

My Personal Review:
I felt this book was outstanding. Steve Martins neat and compact novel is able to evoke a wide variety of emotions. I genuinely cared about Mirabella and I didnt always like, but understood the male characters. All are fully realized neatly and concisely. Steve accurately and sometimes bluntly captures their human qualities. His characters are fully developed and real. He does in a few words and a straightforward style what many, more verbose authors, cannot.