

ELKA KONSTANTINOVA ABOUT ALBENA STAMBOLOVA'S NOVEL:

“This Is the Way It Happens In Life and In Fairy Tales”

Albena Stambolova's novel, a story about love and death in which the fates of seven protagonists meet and gradually reveal themselves to be parts of the same tapestry, is told in an entertaining yet concise style devoid of lyrical digressions or unnecessary descriptions. With its succinct character sketches and sparsely narrated events, the novel builds a plot which unfolds in an unconventional way. Small details, although very economically presented, play an important role in the depiction of each event. For example, the old woman's cheerful and attentive gaze which enchants Boris during his visits at the beginning, his childlike wonder at the mystery of baptism, and the symbol of the chapel where he is christened and where, years later, Maria dies; or the barely underlined fact that the autopsy of Maria's beautiful body does not reveal any visible cause of death..

Stambolova's authorial presence blends successfully with the story-telling of the novel. Her analysis and judgment over the characters is present but not intrusive. She lives with her characters: Maria, Philip, Boris, Margarita, Valentin, Raya, Fanny are creations of her own sensibility, moral tolerance and generosity. Accepting them the way they present themselves to her imagination, Stambolova manages to imbue these characters with her own intellectual and emotional responses towards the modern world. And seen through her eyes, our peculiarly sick world forces us to recognize the depth of our own personal dramas, our own stories inevitably related to our ability to know ourselves and to know others. In her protagonists, she reveals the hidden psychological processes which imperceptibly, yet fatally, shape their behavior and define their spiritual development. ...

Each of the seven protagonists represents a unique rebus with multiple layers of meaning. Why is everyone so impressed with Maria at first sight, and why is she unforgettable? Why does Margarita hide herself in Boris's suitcase? Why is it that Margarita and Valentin cannot stand each other in the beginning but then become inseparable? ... The seven main protagonists here are reminiscent of fairy tale heroes (e.g. Valentin and Fanny are like Kay and Gerda in the Snow Queen story). Each one of them, however, is also idiosyncratic, deliberately differentiated from anything banal. And each protagonist, being the embodiment of a mysterious psychological principle, expresses a specific existential idea.

The novel's protagonists do not tell about their problems; they do not declare anything about themselves, but they experience their lives intensely. Everything happens the way it happens in the real world, yet behind the fateful events and phenomena, transpires another reality which belongs to fairy tales. This reality is hidden in the protagonists' souls, in their silence, in their hard-won independence, in their painful affections for each other. Some of them, for example, Maria and Margarita, live “absent-mindedly”, absorbed in themselves and in their dreams. Others inhabit more actively the reality of their being (e.g. Philip, Boris, Valentin). The fates of all cross in dramatic relationships and melancholy separations. Although short-lived, the love which sparks between them (between Maria and Philip, between Maria and Boris) has fatal consequences, shaping inexorably their future.

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